

**Children's perspectives on child well-being:
A pathway to sustainable futures.
A case study in the Brits and Rustenburg areas in North
West Province.**

by

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

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ETHICS STATEMENT

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 (16124686 /HUM020/0821).

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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ABSTRACT

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

A case study in the Brits and Rustenburg areas in North West Province

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Well-being is a multi-dimensional construct that refers to the positive relationship that one has with others, feeling content and having a degree of control over one's life. Child well-being involves physical, mental, cognitive, social, material and environmental domains of well-being. Given that child well-being was often studied from the perspectives of adults, this study was conducted with the aim of understanding the subjective well-being of children - or how children perceive their own well-being - as a pathway to sustainable futures. As children's development is influenced by their environment, the ecological systems theory was the theoretical framework for the study.

A qualitative research approach and an interpretative research paradigm were adopted to understand children's subjective views on child well-being. As the research findings were aimed to inform social work practice, the study was categorised as applied research. An instrumental case study design was relevant for understanding the well-being of children by exploring their own views. By means of purposive and snowball sampling, a study sample of 10 children in middle childhood were recruited in the Brits and Rustenburg areas in the North West province. Semi-structured interviews guided by an interview schedule and visual communication cards were used to collect data. Thematic data analysis was implemented to analyse the data. Research ethical principles guided the implementation of the study to prevent harm to the research participants.

The findings from the study revealed that children's well-being was associated with children being happy, loved and cared for, while their well-being was influenced by their interactions with their parents, siblings, members of the extended family, friends, teachers and even their pets. The research findings show that meeting children's needs, having access to relevant community resources, and positive environmental conditions would support children's well-being. The participants also suggested actions by adults and by children themselves that could enhance child well-being. The study revealed that children can voice their opinions on child well-being and that they can participate collaboratively with adults in enhancing their well-being if their views are considered and they are given opportunities for participation.

All things considered, social workers can be in the frontline when it comes to protecting and enhancing children's well-being by acting, amongst others, as advocates and educators for relevant interventions and services on different ecological levels. Further research on child well-being in South Africa can inform interventions to enhance the well-being of South Africa's children.

Key concepts

Child

Child well-being

Sustainable development

Sustainable futures

Child participation

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CHAPTER 1

GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Well-being is a multidimensional construct and emphasises how a person evaluates his or her physical, mental and socio-economic status, where the positive outweighs the negative. The evaluation of one's life is influenced by the interpersonal, intrapersonal, cultural and societal relationships within a person's environment (Minkinen, 2013:549; Newland, Giger, Lawler, Roh, Brockveld & Schwenle, 2019:395). According to Amerijckx and Humblet (2014:410), some people understand well-being as a process while others understand it as a present state.

Well-being can be measured using subjective indicators such as people's perception of happiness, their views on their life and the quality of their life; and objective indicators which include a person's health status, educational resources and household income (Statham & Chase, 2010:2). In the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the United Nations (2015:3) acknowledges the importance of people's well-being and sets universal goals for developed and developing countries to improve all people's economic, social, and environmental development.

According to Ben-Arieh, Casas, Frønes & Korbin (2014:3) and Nahkur & Kutsar (2019:354), children's well-being encompasses their physical, cognitive, emotional, social, spiritual, and environmental welfare, with their current well-being significantly impacting their future development. All these aspects or indicators must be considered to fully understand children's well-being (Ayala-Nunes, Jiménez, Jesus, Nunes & Hidalgo, 2018:815; Minkinen, 2013:549).

Several international, regional and local legislative frameworks focus on the well-being of children. These include the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (African Union, 1990) and the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Republic of South Africa, 1996). In addition, the country's National Development Plan and the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals focus on children's well-being, of which the SAHRC & UNICEF (2016:3) emphasise six areas that are important for children's development: "social inclusion, nutrition, health and HIV, water and sanitation, education."

Despite the above legislation and the 2030 Agenda, many South African children are still exposed to conditions that present risks to their well-being. Children's well-being is influenced by the environment in which they grow up, which can contain both risk and protective factors (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:812-813). Amerijckx and Humblet (2013:3) add that well-being is

evaluated according to culture, which will determine how well-being is perceived in the individual's society. The State of the South African Child Report (Nelson Mandela Children's Fund, 2023:50) identified several significant and interconnected domains that negatively affect the lives and well-being of South Africa's children: child poverty, unequal access to healthcare and to quality education, inadequate housing and basic services, and protection from violence. Children's well-being is negatively affected by social and economic inequality that still exist despite the SDG efforts (Lombard, 2015:484; SAHRC & UNICEF, 2016:5).

Developmental social work is the national welfare approach followed in South Africa with the aim to promote the well-being of the entire South African nation (Van Breda, 2018a:66). Social workers following a developmental approach aim to promote the well-being of individuals, families, groups and communities by "a dual focus on the person and the environment and the interaction between the two" (Patel, 2015:127). The Framework for Social Development (Department of Social Development, 2013:30) stipulates that, although social work services should be provided equally to all people and focus on the family as the central unit, the profession needs to concentrate specifically on the more vulnerable groups in South African society, which include children and the youth. Developmental social work focuses, amongst others, on empowering service users and gaining their active participation in addressing their problems (Patel, 2015:127-128).

In addition, South Africa's National Child Participation Framework was developed with the purpose of ensuring "better levels of participation of children across all settings so that their right to participate in matters affecting their lives is fulfilled" (Department of Social Development, Save the Children & NDP 2030, 2018:8). Linking to this notion, advocating for children's participation in their own well-being by allowing their voices to be heard is important and child participation is increasingly emphasised in research on child well-being (Fattore, Fegter & Hunner-Kreisel, 2019:387; Fattore, Mason & Watson, 2012:424).

Children's well-being has often been researched from the perspectives of adults and professionals, such as parents, caregivers, social workers, psychologists, teachers and paediatricians, while children's own views have been ignored and deemed unimportant. The need to hear children's perspective on their well-being must therefore be explored (Casas, 2019:334; Lloyd & Emerson, 2017:594). Lloyd and Emerson (2017:594) point out that it is imperative to assess well-being from children's and adolescents' perspectives as their views have shown to differ from adults' perspectives. These authors explain that, in their views on child well-being, adults tended to emphasise family, friends and home while children emphasised feeling secure. This study therefore aimed to explore and understand children's perspective on their well-being.

1.2 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

The key concepts relevant to the study are as follows:

- **Child**

Legally, a child is defined as anyone who is under the age of 18. This is according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 1 (United Nations, 1989), the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Section 28(3) (Republic of South Africa, 1996), and the Children's Act 38 of 2005, Section 1. This study involved child participants between the ages of 8 and 12 who are in the developmental stage of middle childhood (Berk, 2013:179).

- **Child well-being**

Child well-being is regarded as a multidimensional construct of which there has been diverse definitions (Minkinnen, 2013:547). Ben-Arieh et al. (2014:1) refer to child well-being as "the quality of children's lives economically and emotionally; to their psychological states; to their material, social, and cultural environments; as well as to their development and to realizing their potential." Minkinnen (2013:548) defines child well-being as a dynamic process that is influenced by processes within and between people and their society and culture, in which their "physical, mental, social and material situation is more commonly positive than negative." In this study, child well-being is regarded as children's positive perceptions and experiences within their social environment.

- **Sustainable development**

Sustainable development is defined as the growth that satisfies the current needs and maximise the well-being of the present generation and does not negatively affect the well-being of future generations and their ability to meet their needs (Ahenkan & Osei-Kojo, 2014:163; Peeters, 2012:293). Improving people's economic, social, and environmental well-being is a key objective of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This is achieved with the intention of creating a just, equitable, and inclusive society that will be able to meet the needs of its most vulnerable members (Lombard, 2015:493).

- **Sustainable futures**

The Global Education Monitoring Report defines a sustainable future as a future that "is about human dignity, social inclusion and environmental protection" (United Nations, 2016:i). In this regard, the sustainable developmental goals are implemented to not only benefit the current generation, but also to meet the needs of future generations and to create a better future for all people (United Nations, 2015:6, 12). The term 'sustainable futures' will be used in this study to refer to futures for children without the presence of social challenges such as inequality,

poverty, crime and a lack of basic services. This type of future can be made possible by allowing children to participate in interventions intended for enhancing their well-being. Savahl, Tiliouine, Casas, Adams, Mekonene, Dejene, Benninger and Witten (2017:39) emphasise that governments must intervene proactively to strengthen families' ability to meet the material and other basic requirements of their children, as this has an important effect on the well-being of the children. Also, Peeters (2012:289) argues that social policy can help to ensure sustainable futures by addressing present generations' overconsumption, resource depletion, and environmental damage.

- **Child participation**

Child participation refers to children's right to freely express their views and participate in and be informed about all matters that concern them. Underpinning both the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 12) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (African Children's Charter), participation is acknowledged as a fundamental principle supporting children's rights (Viljoen, 2022:21-22). In the context of this study, child participation refers to listening to children's perspectives on child well-being. For children to participate meaningfully, they should be provided with knowledge and freedom for expressing their views. Knowing and understanding what children perceive as their well-being will help determine if there is enough done in advocating for what is best for them (Savahl et al., 2017:32).

1.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To enhance children's well-being, it is helpful to understand the children's environment and the reciprocal relationships that exist between children and their environment as these relationships play a significant role in their development and well-being. It is important to note that the environment comprises of processes such as interaction, time and numerous contexts, which is conceptualised in the ecological systems theory coined by Urie Bronfenbrenner (Burns, Warmbold-Brann & Zaslosfky, 2015:250). The ecological systems theory was the underpinning theory of this study. As contextual factors such as the family and the wider social environment affect children's well-being, an ecological approach is relevant to study this topic (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:814).

According to Louw, Louw and Kail (2014:29), Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1995) ecological systems theory views the child as "embedded in a series of complex and interactive systems." The ecological theory shows different societal levels in which children function, from the microsystem that is the child's most immediate environment and the mesosystem that refers to the interactions between different microsystems, to the wider ecological levels of the exosystem and macrosystem that indirectly influence children (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:813).

- **The microsystem**

The microsystem is the system in which children are directly involved and includes the home and several subsystems that allow a child's active learning through direct participation (Amerijckx & Humblet, 2013:5; Onwuegbuzie, Collins & Frels, 2013:4). In addition to the home environment, the microsystem includes the child's school, friends, church and neighbourhood (Arnett & Maynard, 2017:25; Louw et al., 2014:29). The mutual interpersonal relationships embedded in these systems influence children's mental health and subjective well-being either in a positive or a negative way (Nahkur & Kutsar, 2019:357). Studies have revealed a link between positive interpersonal relationships within the microsystem and a child's mental health (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:814; Newland et al., 2019:398). Conversely, there are also harmful dynamics that can exist in the microsystem, including poor parenting, parental stress and psychological issues, poor parent-child interactions, child neglect and attachment issues (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:814; Newland et al., 2019:398; Nahkur & Kutsar, 2019:358). Buck, Summers, Smith and Harwell (2018:1255) note that the social interactions in the child's household are also affected by the time children spend on digital devices. Due to the increasing availability and use of digital technology in the home, Johnson and Puplampu (2008:5) regard technology as a techno-subsystem that forms a dimension of the child's microsystem. Furthermore, due to children's direct interactions within the microsystem, social workers should consider the nature of the microsystem to plan and implement interventions that are relevant to service users (Langer & Lietz, 2014:33).

- **The mesosystem**

The mesosystem encompasses the direct interactions among microsystems and includes the child's interactions in the community in which the child resides, for example the child's school, peers and neighbours (Amerijckx & Humblet, 2013:51; Langer & Lietz, 2014:33; Louw et al., 2014:29). Resources existing in the community, such as after-school care, schools and youth groups, can provide social and educational support that can enhance children's well-being (Berk, 2013:27). The online world can also be viewed as part of the mesosystem. Online social technologies can influence children's development and well-being as children are exposed to interactions with parents and friends but also to risks such as online interactions with strangers or exposure to pornography (Nadan & Kaye-Tzadok, 2019:472-273). An important characteristic of the mesosystem is thus the reciprocal influence among different microsystems. What occurs in one microsystem, for example a child's home, will influence other microsystems, for example a child's functioning at school (Louw et al., 2014:29). Social workers can thus focus on whether the quality of relationships between microsystems benefit or harm a child's development (Langer & Lietz, 2014:33).

- **The exosystem**

The exosystem comprises of the wider social environment in which the child does not directly participate; however, it has an indirect influence on the development of the child (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013:4). This system involves the social world of a parent such as the parents' place of employment and friendship groups, the media, and the place of worship (Berk, 2013:28; Louw et al., 2014:29). Whereas support to parents by resources in the exosystem can enhance children's well-being, children's development and mental health can be negatively influenced by characteristics in the exosystem such as poverty-stricken communities, unemployment, social isolation, and violent neighbourhoods (Berk, 2013:28; Nahkur & Kutsar, 2019:358). To protect children from such harm, parents can offer support to others; for example, parents with positive parenting skills can demonstrate skills to other parents who lack these skills (Alaya-Nunes et al., 2018:814).

- **The macrosystem**

The macrosystem encompasses the above-mentioned systems and includes the politics, legislation, ideologies, culture, values, customs, resources and environmental factors that influence children's development (Arnett & Maynard, 2017:26; Langer & Lietz, 2014:33-34; Louw et al., 2014:29). Aspects such as the values, policies and resources within the macrosystem will thus influence the microsystem, mesosystem and the exosystem. Research studies found that countries that are economically sound and have sufficient resources contribute to high levels of subjective well-being in children (Newland et al., 2019:398). Children living in countries that provide resources such as family benefits, preschool education and parental leave reported more positive subjective well-being. When parental support and benefits are offered, parenting practices are enhanced, which serve as buffers against economic hardships and help to decrease environmental risks, psychological distress, behavioural challenges and maternal depression (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:814). Important to note, is that the macrosystem evolves over time in accordance with social change.

- **The chronosystem**

The chronosystem can be understood as the evolutionary process that occurs in a child's environment that determines how a child develops and adapts in life (Langer & Lietz, 2014:34). Change comes in various forms, such as parental death or separation, the relocation to another school or home, the arrival of a new sibling, physiological developmental changes and intellectual, physical and personal growth (Berk, 2013:28; Louw et al., 2014:30). The chronosystem thus shows the continuously changing nature of children's lives and environments. These changes are reflected in child-well-being as a dynamic concept that is

influenced by children's social, emotional, and cognitive development, the potential of change over time, and to the eudaimonic view of development being a process of growth and self-fulfilment (Casas & Frönes, 2019:2; Minkkinen, 2013:3).

The ecological systems theory provides an understanding of child well-being as it focuses on proximal contexts such as the child's immediate family environment and on distal contexts such as the wider society and the economy. All these contexts have direct or indirect impact on a child's well-being and development (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:813). Masoga and Shokane (2018:4) explain that it is expected that people will face challenges throughout their life courses and will need to draw from inner resources as well as resources in their environment and social networks to cope. Hence, there is an interdependence between the person and the environment. Social workers are part of the system that is responsible for multidisciplinary interventions that bring about change in people's lives. Warria (2018:288) states in this regard that "[e]cological theory ... is important as a multi-dimensional intervention approach used by social workers, and it is a theory that is often cited and widely used in social work practice." Understanding the influence of the various ecological systems on a child's development will help social workers to form a holistic view of their service users (Langer & Lietz, 2014:30).

1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RATIONALE

Children's well-being entails their quality of life that is linked to their emotions, economic background, psychological states, social environment and their development. All these factors have a significant impact on realising their abilities to ensure a sustainable future (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014:1; Newland et al., 2019:395; Minkkinen, 2013:550). Children's health and well-being are influenced by the environment in which they interact and live. Protective factors in their environment can enhance children's functioning and promote their resilience, whereas risk factors in their environment increase children's chances of developing psychological problems (Yule, Houston & Grych, 2019:419). Being able to realise one's abilities suggests the absence of psychiatric disorders and being cognitively and emotionally well. The presence of psychiatric disorders inhibits children's well-being as it can lead to disabilities, morbidity and mortality (Nahkur & Kutsar, 2019:354).

Risk factors to children's well-being include poor parenting, poor family relationships, poverty, and exposure to violence in their family and community (Nahkur & Kudzar, 2019:357; Yule et al., 2019:406). Challenges experienced by children can thus be found within their family context and in their communities as well as in other environments that they do not directly participate in, including the natural environment (Amerijckx & Humblet, 2013:5; Peeters, 2012:287). Poverty is a significant risk factor that affects children's physical, social, emotional and cognitive well-being through limited access to resources and support that result, amongst

others, in poor housing, poor nutrition, a lack of quality health care, parental stress, parental substance abuse, and exposure to abuse and violence (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:812). Exposure to violence is more likely in low-income communities, which increases children's risk for socio-emotional problems such as post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, poor academic performance, aggression and anti-social behaviour (Yule et al., 2019:406).

South African children are exposed to many of the above-mentioned risk factors. In their study, Naidoo and Muthukrishna (2016:4) identified challenges to children's well-being that included, amongst others, poverty and underdevelopment, exposure to crime, unequal access to health care and education, unsafe schools, substance abuse, corporal punishment, physical and sexual abuse, and HIV and AIDS. Lake, Shung-King, Hendricks, Heywood, Nannan, Laubscher et al. (2019:32) conclude that, despite many improvements in terms of children's health in the nearly 25 years since democracy, "inequalities have widened; poverty, hunger and violence continue to compromise children's health and development; and emerging challenges, such as climate change and the growing burden of obesity and noncommunicable diseases, threaten to erode recent gains." Even though South Africa has made great strides toward implementing the Sustainable Development Goals for Children, South African children are still faced with various socio-economic challenges (SAHRC & UNICEF, 2016:3).

To break the poverty cycle and improve the socioeconomic outcomes for the entire society, Ayala-Nunes et al. (2018:813) advise that it is important to promote children's well-being, stating that investments in children's well-being and development, particularly of children from adverse social environments, are increasingly gaining attention as a political priority. Despite being a vulnerable group, all children have the potential to develop optimally if there are positive changes to their physical and social environments (Buck et al., 2018:1252).

Important to note, is that the social work profession focuses on the well-being of individuals, families, groups and communities and how their well-being is influenced by their social environment (Patel, 2015:127; Peeters, 2012:287). Recently, the profession has increased its ecological focus to include the well-being of the natural environment (Lombard, 2015:487; Peeters, 2012:288). Social workers who deliver services in accordance with a developmental approach to social work can play an important role to advocate for sustainable development and the welfare of children (Lombard & Viviers, 2014:83; Patel, 2015:127). Services that focus on child well-being should be implemented with consideration of all factors that have an influence on children's well-being (Nahkur & Kudsar, 2019:354).

Studies on child well-being have received more attention in recent years; however, most studies are based on the views of adults, while the perceptions of adults may not be relevant to children's well-being (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014:10; Buck et al., 2018:1254). In addition, socio-

cultural contexts may also influence people's perceptions of child well-being (Mashford-Scott, Church & Tayler, 2012:235). It is suggested that children's own views could provide a better indication of what child well-being entails due to the subjective nature of well-being as well as their knowledge of their own lives (Fattore & Mason, 2017:276-277; Minkinen, 2013:4). This research study was thus intended to explore the perspectives of a sample of South African children on child well-being. As several quantitative studies on child well-being have been conducted (Nadan & Kaye-Tzadok, 2019:462-463), this study followed a qualitative research approach. The research findings could potentially shed light on ways to promote a pathway for sustainable futures for South African children. The research question for the study was: *"What are children's perspectives on child well-being as a pathway to sustainable futures within the South African context, based on a case study in the Brits and Rustenburg areas in North West Province?"*

1.5 GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The goal of the study was to explore children's perspectives on their well-being as a pathway to a sustainable future within the South African context, based on a case study in the Brits and Rustenburg areas in North West Province.

The objectives of the study were as follows:

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

1.6 SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

An interpretive research paradigm and a qualitative research approach was relevant to the study. Interpretivism views reality as socially constructed and not objectively measured (Nieuwenhuis, 2020a:67) and thus fitted with exploring well-being from the perspectives of children. A qualitative research approach is relevant for understanding the participants' world through the meaning that they attach to their experiences and enabled the researcher to

understand and describe the phenomenon of child well-being as perceived by the research participants (Fouché, 2021a:40; Nieuwenhuis, 2020a:59). In terms of the purpose of the research, an exploratory purpose supported the study's goal of gaining insight into the phenomenon of child well-being, and a descriptive purpose was relevant as the research findings were described in this research report (Fouché, 2021b:64-65; Nieuwenhuis, 2020a:60-61).

Applied research was the type of research for the study as the research findings could be used by social workers to contribute to a sustainable future for children. Applied research refers to studies that aim to apply the research findings to find solutions for social concerns of problems faced by certain groups of people (Bless, Higson-Smith & Sithole, 2013:389; Fouché, 2021b:58). The study was implemented according to a case study design, specifically the instrumental case study, as the goal of the study was to understand the meaning that the research participants assign to their life experiences (Nieuwenhuis, 2020b:89, 90-91; Schurink, Schurink & Fouché, 2021a:302).

By using purposive sampling, participants were selected according to specific sampling criteria, while snowball sampling was also used because the researcher had limited knowledge of the study population (Strydom, 2021:382-383). The study sample consisted of 10 participants between the ages of 8 and 12 who lived in Brits and Rustenburg and who could communicate in English.

Data were collected by means of one-to-one semi-structured interviews, in which an interview schedule and visual communication cards were used to aid data collection (Geyer, 2021:358; Nieuwenhuis, 2020b:103). The researcher transcribed the audio recordings of the interviews, which were then used for thematic data analysis, while also considering measures to enhance data quality (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017:3-4). Principles and guidelines required for ethical research practice were implemented during the study (Bless et al., 2013:25; Strydom & Roostenburg, 2021:117). The research methodology and ethical considerations for the study will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 of this report.

1.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

It is recognised that the findings of qualitative research studies are not intended to be generalised (Schurink, Schurink & Fouché, 2021b:393). It is noted that the study involved a small study sample of children within a specific developmental age (middle childhood) and who lived in a specific geographical location. The research findings can thus not be directly transferred to other child populations and children in other geographical contexts. The findings could, however, be used to build a knowledge base about the well-being of South African children.

1.8 CONTENTS OF THE RESEARCH REPORT

The chapter outline for the study is as follows:

Chapter 1: General overview of the study

An overview of the research study was provided in this chapter. The following aspects were discussed: an overview of the research topic and key concepts of the study, the theoretical framework, problem statement and rationale of the study, the study's goal and objectives, a summary of the research methodology, and an indication of the limitations of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature review on child well-being

The literature review for the study is presented in Chapter 2. The discussion focuses on the concepts of well-being and child well-being, factors influencing children's well-being, legislative frameworks that can support the well-being of children, and the potential role of social workers in promoting child well-being. As the participants in the study were children in middle childhood, the chapter also contains a summary of the developmental characteristics of children in this life stage.

Chapter 3: Research methodology and empirical findings

In this chapter, the researcher presents and motivates the research methodology and the ethical considerations that were followed in the implementation of the study. Furthermore, the empirical findings of the study are presented.

Chapter 4: Key findings, conclusions and recommendations

In this chapter, the key findings of the study are summarised, followed by conclusions based on the research findings. The discussion is concluded by providing recommendations for practice and for future studies, followed by an indication of the achievement of the study's goal and objectives.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW: CHILD WELL-BEING

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The literature review will entail a discussion of literature on child well-being and subjective child well-being. Factors such as the dimensions of child well-being, indicators of child well-being, factors influencing child well-being, and relevant legislative frameworks will be discussed. Equally important, the chapter will contain a discussion of child well-being in the South African context as well as the role social workers play in promoting children's well-being. Lastly, the developmental characteristics of the child in middle childhood will be summarised as the developmental stage relevant to the participants in the study.

2.2 THE CONCEPT 'WELL-BEING'

The concept 'well-being' will be discussed in terms of its definition, objective and subjective well-being, and general dimensions of well-being.

2.2.1 Defining well-being

Well-being is multifaceted construct of which there is no universally agreed definition on what the concept means (King, Renó & Novo, 2014:682). According to Loveridge, Sallu, Pesha and Marshall (2020:461), there is still ongoing debates on conceptualising and measuring well-being, and the authors suggest that a conceptualisation of well-being should consider "what people need to participate and flourish in society." Importantly, well-being must be understood in relation to the values and cultural framework of society, which implies that well-being is a dynamic concept that can differ over time and between contexts (Ben-Arieh & Frønes, 2011:464).

Ben Arieh et al. (2014:1) regard well-being as the person's subjective feelings, experiences and living conditions that support them to live a life of happiness, health and flourishing, while Lloyd and Emerson (2017:593) point out that the subjective elements of well-being include an individual's interpersonal relationships with others. Well-being also includes objective elements such as an individual's level of education, health and income. Overall, well-being can be understood as an individual's experience and evaluation of his or her quality of life (Statham & Chase, 2010:2). Ruggeri, Garcia-Garzon, Maguire, Matz and Huppert (2020:1) describe different aspects of well-being:

Well-being has been defined as the combination of feeling good and functioning well; the experience of positive emotions such as happiness and contentment as well as the development of one's potential, having some control over one's life, having a sense of purpose, and experiencing positive relationships.

Casas (2019:334) agrees that well-being comprises of factors that contributes to the quality of life that can be evaluated either objectively or subjectively. According to Ben-Arieh et al. (2014:1), well-being encompasses a person's subjective state of happiness, the fulfilment of wishes and desires and their objective state of health, prosperity, living circumstances as well as opportunities for personal growth and self-fulfilment. Objective well-being refers to material aspects of life, whereas subjective well-being refers to a person's evaluation of his or her personal circumstances (Loveridge et al., 2020:462).

2.2.2 Objective well-being

Objective well-being is measured by assessing material and social resources and the opportunities that people have in accessing those resources (Casas & Frønes, 2019:3). Factors such as community standards, social capital and material standards are used to evaluate well-being objectively (Ben-Arieh & Frønes, 2011:463) and well-being can objectively be measured through educational, philosophical, socioeconomic, psychological and mental health indicators (Mashford-Scott et al., 2012:235). People's objective well-being is thus determined by factors such as their health status, education, housing and household income (King et al., 2014:682-283; Statham & Chase, 2010:2).

It can be deduced that objective well-being is determined by evaluating quantifiable and observable elements of well-being (Statham & Chase, 2010:5; Omar & Ah, 2017:8). Objective well-being entails measuring the quality of life of society by others, for example by experts. This is how children's well-being has mostly been measured: objectively, by not considering their views on their own well-being. Instead, children's well-being has been considered from the perspectives of experts and from their parents' point of view (Casas, 2019:334). Casas and Frønes (2019:3) note that while objective well-being influence the factors that contribute to subjective well-being, there is not necessarily a correlation between the two; meaning that there is often disagreement between the objective and subjective indicators provided by experts and community members. An example is the disagreement between the views of the hospital staff and the patients regarding the quality of service being offered in health care facilities (Casas & Frønes, 2019:3).

2.2.3 Subjective well-being

Subjective well-being refers to an individual's evaluation with regards to his or her life, which encompasses both positive and negative experiences (Savahl, Casas & Adams, 2017:2; Nadan & Tzadok, 2019:461). This evaluation will also include evaluating one's life at the population level, which is the macro level (Goswami, 2014:120). Ben-Arieh et al. (2014:3) describe subjective well-being as "what is good for the individual from their own perspective."

Subjective well-being relates to a personal perspective of one's life, therefore people's thoughts and feelings concerning their lives, and their happiness and satisfaction with their quality of life (King et al., 2014:683; Statham & Chase, 2010:2). The term 'subjective well-being' is thus used to describe people's views, goals, and assessments of their lives (Fattore & Mason, 2017:278; Nadan & Kaye-Tzadok, 2019:462).

According to Casas and Frönes (2019:5), subjective well-being is a multifaceted concept with various components. The Children's World Project identified three primary components of subjective well-being: cognitive, affective and psychological well-being. Cognitive subjective well-being relates to how people evaluate their lives, affective subjective well-being focuses on their feelings and moods, and psychological well-being focuses on their perspectives on the fulfilment of their psychological needs and their sense of accomplishment (Rees & Main, 2015:34). Hence, it is beneficial to understand people's evaluations and aspirations about their own lives as it will better assist policy makers and social professionals in developing interventions that will be relevant to people's needs. The following section contains a discussion of different indicators utilised to measure well-being.

2.3 GLOBAL INDICATORS OF WELL-BEING

The United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development suggests several economic, social and environmental objectives that are intended to create equitable and inclusive societies and a just and inclusive environment for the well-being of all people (Lombard, 2015:483). Sustainability is a process whereby humans can meet their current needs and, at the same time, do not compromise future generations' ability to meet their needs (Hawkins, 2010:69). The need for sustainability and social development results from a concern over human overconsumption and the depletion of natural resources (Peeters, 2012:289). It is also motivated by the need to uphold social justice for people for them to meet their social, mental, and physical needs. Social justice can be defined as a situation where diverse people have access to equal opportunities, basic rights, protection and well-being (Lombard, 2014:46).

The economic, social and environmental dimensions of development are generally accepted as core elements of sustainable development (Berglund & Gericke, 2016:1117). Dimensions or indicators can be described as factual statistics that can be used to assess either the present or future state of social or economic situations as well as to related values and goals. Indicators are employed not only as evaluation instruments but also to give insight into political and policy contexts. The context is derived from theories, models and ways in which the indicators interact with one another. Apart from being essential for assessing situations or circumstances, indicators are also necessary for goal creation (Ben-Arieh & Frönes, 2011:462).

2.3.1 Social indicators

Social well-being comprises of an individual's mental and social health which can be attributed to positive interactions with other people and their environment (Rahdarzadeh & Adibisedeh (2016:194). Social interactions with others are so critical that when they are positive, they bring a sense of happiness and when they are negative, they tend to negatively affect people's psychological well-being (Branscombe & Baron, 2017:32). It has been found that social support is a significant aspect of social well-being as it enhances a sense of belonging and life satisfaction (Rahdarzadeh & Adibisedeh, 2016:197-197). King et al. (2014:686-687) note that whereas social indicators of well-being can be measured in terms of the socio-economic factors that affect people's lives, subjective indicators relate to people's experiences and their perceptions of their social environment. Examples include good social relations that build on social cohesion, helping others, mutual respect and freedom of choice that enable individuals to achieve what they value in terms of being and doing (King et al., 2014:685). Promoting the social well-being of people can support the development of strong local communities and a healthy society (Lombard, 2015:487; Rahdarzadeh & Adibisedeh, 2016:194).

2.3.2 Economic indicators

Economic hardships are associated with material burdens as well as social exclusion, and are characterised by aspects such as unemployment, poor housing quality, poor nutrition and poor health conditions (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:826). While the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development emphasises the importance of sustainable and inclusive economic growth to support the well-being of a country's people, vulnerable sections of the population are particularly affected by poor economic conditions (Lombard, 2015:484). Chaudry and Wimer (2016:S23) regard the poverty rate is an indicator of child well-being as it increases knowledge of how well the economy is functioning. The number of children living in poverty also provides a moral gauge for society's views about children born into specific situations. It is therefore critical that countries focus on the elimination of economic challenges such as poverty and unemployment to address inequalities, and that governments, local authorities, the business and private sector, and civil society, amongst others, should collaborate towards this goal (Lombard, 2015:485, 489). Grainger-Brown and Malekpour (2019:2) agree that all levels of society must collaborate as governments alone will hardly be able to achieve the goals stated in the 2030 Agenda.

2.3.3 Environmental indicators

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes sustainable development goals (SDGs) that focus on creating a sustainable environment for all people (Lombard, 2015:487). It is recognised that environmental degradation because of human activity as well as climate

change pose risks to the environment. The SDGs therefore include a focus on factors such as addressing environmental challenges and natural disasters by attending to the management and conservation of forests and oceans as well as climate change (Grainger-Brown & Malekpour, 2019:1; Lombard, 2015:486-487). Alston (2015:357) mentions that people who are already exposed to challenges in making a living or who have unmet socioeconomic rights, for example living in poverty, poor living conditions and poor health care, are mostly affected by disasters. In recent years, studies on child well-being have shown an increased focus on the influence of the environment where children spend most of their time (Adams, Savahl, Florence & Jackson, 2019:547; Buck et al., 2018:1263; David & Weinstein, 2013:4). Environmental indicators for well-being must thus be considered because disaster-stricken communities affect families and children. Lombard and Viviers (2014:84) postulate that professionals such as social workers must recognise the right of children to participate in matters related to climate change to build pathways towards sustainable futures. Hence, there is a need to challenge practices that do not recognise children's participation rights (Manyena, Fordham & Collins, 2008:313).

In the case of human well-being, the interaction of biological, psychological and social elements needs to be considered when developing indicators that portray well-being. It is necessary to adopt a multifaceted approach that consider the interaction of these elements with one another (Ben-Arieh & Frønes, 2011:462).

2.3 THE CONCEPT 'CHILD WELL-BEING'

Different definitions of child well-being exist and reflect the varying views of the concept (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:812). Minkinnen (2013:547) notes that child well-being is difficult to define because of the different views as well as to the multidimensional nature of the phenomenon. In this section, definitions of child well-being and general indicators of children's well-being will be discussed.

2.3.1 Defining child well-being

Child well-being can be described as the positive integration of the child's physical, emotional, social and cognitive functioning that leads to the fulfilment of relationships, the ability to engage in productive and significant activities in their community, and the development of resilience (Pollard & Rosenberg, 2003 in Savahl, Isaacs, Adams, Carels & September, 2013:580). Minkinnen (2013:549) defines child well-being as "a dynamic process wherein a person's physical, mental, social and material situation is more commonly positive than negative, and as an outcome of intrapersonal, interpersonal, societal and cultural processes." Casas and Frønes (2019:5) add that child well-being can also be understood through considering eudaimonic and hedonic perspectives, where eudaimonic refers to considering

psychological well-being and hedonic is concerned with finding pleasure or enjoyment in one's life. Children's physical, emotional, cognitive, social, spiritual, and environmental well-being are all part of their overall well-being, which is characterised by an absence of mental or psychological issues. Children's well-being should be protected and promoted as there are negative consequences for the child's overall functioning if it is neglected (Nahkur & Kutsar, 2019:354).

Child well-being is thus a multi-dimensional construct that includes several well-being dimensions or domains (Savahl et al., 2013:580). To fully understand child well-being, all the different dimensions should be considered (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:815; Minkinnen, 2013:549). Children's well-being must thus be evaluated based on various factors, for example their economic situation, interpersonal relationships, cognitive abilities, neighbourhood connections, health, safety, security and cultural fulfilment (Buck et al., 2018:1254; Nadan & Kaye-Tzadok, 2019:463).

Mashford-Scott et al. (2012:235) emphasise that there may be varied perceptions of child well-being because the concept is socially and culturally constructed. Additionally, a person's subjective well-being will ultimately determine his or her level of well-being (Minkinen, 2013:4). Casas and Frönes (2019:4) define children's subjective well-being as "a term that usually refers to children's evaluations of various domains of their life in terms of satisfaction, happiness, fears and apprehensions in the present." In addition, child well-being can also be understood through considering eudaimonic and hedonic perspectives (Casas and Frönes (2019:5). However, to be truly well and healthy in all aspects of life, a person's objective and subjective well-being needs must be satisfied (Naidoo & Muthukrishna, 2016:8).

Important to note, is that the well-being of children has an impact of their current state, in the here and now, and is also a process that impacts their growth and future prospects (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014:1). The state of children's well-being thus has an influence on their present lives as well as on how they grow and develop in the future. According to Bammer, Michaux and Sanson (2010:15), for children to grow up to be adults who will positively contribute to society, their health and well-being must be ensured during the early years. It is critical to learn what children believe to be essential for their well-being and to enhance the support and services they receive during childhood. In this way, child well-being focuses on what is perceived as being good and bad for children as exposure to risks impede on their future well-being (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014:2).

Characteristic of well-being, child well-being comprises of subjective experiences and objective circumstances and must be evaluated taking both approaches into consideration (Uyan-Semerci & Erdoğan, 2017:268). Casas (2019:334) points out that evaluating the well-

being of children purely objectively is insufficient as it will not provide a comprehensive understanding of their well-being. Instead, a subjective evaluation is also needed as it leads to fully understanding people's perceptions of their well-being. The emphasis of child well-being studies has recently moved from being informed by adults to including the voice of the child. This change has aided in the creation of studies on children's subjective well-being that are informed by their experiences (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014:13; Casas & Frönes, 2019:10).

According to research, developing responsive intervention programmes for enhancing children's well-being will depend on a holistic view of their subjective well-being to comprehend how they function as capable individuals (Gross-Manos, Shimoni & Ben-Arieh, 2015:72). Both emotional states and cognitive assessment contribute to subjective well-being (Ortuño-Sierra, Bañuelos, Perez de Albeniz, Molina & Fonseca-Pedrero, 2019:1-2). Thus, children can report on their level of life satisfaction and happiness in a variety of life domains, including social relationships, the virtual world, political voice, and their use of time (Casas & Frönes, 2019:4; McAuley, McKeown & Merriman, 2012:451; Nadan & Kaye-Tzadok, 2019; Rees & Main, 2015:12). There is still much to learn about the study of subjective well-being in children and various indicators have been utilised to measure it (Main, 2014:455).

2.3.2 Domains and indicators of child well-being

Indicators of child well-being must be relevant for gauging circumstances for the same individual at various points in time and through his or her developmental stages (Domínguez-Serrano & Espín, 2018:10). Smith, Case, Smith, Harwell and Summers (2013:81) suggest that different domains of well-being involve children's social, economic and environmental well-being which adopts an ecosystemic view of human well-being. These domains form the foundation for a holistic view of well-being. The authors identify the following domains or indicators of well-being: health, safety and security, social cohesion, living standards, life satisfaction, education, leisure time, spiritual and cultural fulfilment, and connection to nature (Smith et al., 2013:88). In agreement, Buck et al. (2018:1254) mention social cohesiveness, living standard, health, education, a connection to nature, cultural fulfilment, and safety and security as domains that should be considered when measuring a child's well-being. Nadan and Kaye-Tzadok (2019:463) identify eight life domains that can be used to understand children's subjective well-being: the home and family, friends, neighbourhood, school, health, money and possessions, leisure time, and the self. Minkinnen (2013:549-550) structured child well-being into the following dimensions: physical, mental, social and material well-being.

As evident in the above, it is important to note that child well-being is a multidimensional phenomenon. A holistic view must be considered when seeking to understand the dimensions of child well-being as they are co-dependent. When one dimension fails to meet the standards

necessary to promote children's well-being, it has an impact on the other dimensions, which will negatively impact the outcomes for children (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014:6). Since various factors influence children's everyday life, a single domain or indicator cannot be utilised in evaluating children's well-being (Yoo & Ahn, 2017:23). Different authors use the terms 'domains', 'dimensions' and 'indicators' to refer to the concepts that underlie children's well-being. In the following discussion, the term 'domains' will be used.

2.3.2.1 Physical domain

Physical well-being comprises of various elements, namely children's health and physical functioning and the absence of illness or disability (Minkinen, 2013:550). Children's physical health is influenced by factors such as a healthy lifestyle, access to healthcare, proper nutrition, a clean environment and clean water (Minkinen, 2013:550; Smith et al., 2013:80). Negative physical influences can be buffered by the presence of a safe and stable home environment as it can lead to proper guidance in healthy lifestyle which then leads back to physical well-being (Minkinen, 2013:550). An important point is that physical well-being can be enhanced by early medical examinations which can result in the prevention of illnesses and child abnormalities, which can also lead to an improved health (Buck et al., 2018:1261).

All the dimensions of children's well-being are interconnected, and when a child experiences a physical challenge, it could affect the mental health and cognitive well-being of the child (Minkinen, 2013:550). Food insecurity, for example, causes stress in the family environment, which can negatively affect children's academic performance (Buck et al., 2018:1260). Physical incapacity of a child infringes on the Convention on the Rights of the Child as it impedes the child's physical development, personality, talent and mental abilities (Casas & Frønes, 2019:2).

2.3.2.2 Psychological/mental domain

Mental well-being indicators are linked to the absence of psychiatric disorders and to positive emotional and cognitive well-being. Positive emotional well-being comprises of how a child assesses his or her life situation and how happy he or she is with it. In addition, a capacity for emotional regulation, a good self-esteem and resilience are some of the indicators of mental well-being. Mental well-being covers both emotional and cognitive well-being and is linked to subjective feelings of happiness, pleasure, and satisfaction with life (Minkinen, 2013:550). There have been debates with regards to the components of psychological well-being. Casas and Frønes (2019:5) regard the hedonic perspective, which is associated with the idea of subjective well-being, and the eudaimonic perspective, which refers to the idea of psychological well-being, as both being important aspects of psychological well-being. The eudaimonic perspective proposes that well-being is enhanced by engaging in intrinsic and

extrinsic activities such as playing, learning new skills, engaging in hobbies, caring for pets, and spending time with the family (Minkkinen, 2013:552).

2.3.2.3 Educational domain

As previously mentioned, Minkinen (2013:550, 552) includes cognitive well-being under the psychological or mental health domain and regards a child's education as a factor that can promote children's mental well-being. Many mental skills, like resilience, self-control, and high self-esteem, as well as a child's approach to problem-solving, can be seen as internal requirements for mental health. Smith et al. (2013:83) regard education as a separate domain of child well-being. These authors describe educational well-being as the attainment of knowledge and skills and the child's educational achievement and participation in educational activities. A child's educational progress influences other well-being dimensions, for example enhancing the child's psychological well-being through feelings of accomplishment. Children's reading ability enhances their confidence and children who are actively engaged in their school also experience better health (Buck et al, 2019:1256, 1259).

2.3.2.4 Social domain

The social domain of well-being comprises of interactions that a child has with people who support and engage with them. Such people include teachers, the immediate family members, peers and community members (Casas, 2019:339; Minkinen, 2013:551). One of the relationships that is said to be critical in shaping the child's social well-being is the relationship between the child and his or her parents or guardians as this is where the child will be socialised in factors such as how to deal with social situations and learning how to trust (Minkinen, 2015:551). Parental support and engaging in conversations with parents, frequently having family meals, and parents reading for their children are some of the factors that enhance children's life satisfaction (Buck et al., 2018:1255; Kim, Ahn & Lee, 2019:13). In addition, having a sense of belonging and connection with peers at school enhances the social and emotional well-being of a child. The school environment also brings caring teachers, which is a factor that enhances children's well-being (Kim et al., 2019:13). Positive interactions contribute to the social well-being of the child as social and support networks provide a sense of social cohesion and support (Smith et al., 2013:83).

Another way of social interaction that the child can experience is through the digital world using social networks and electronic devices (Buck et al., 2018:1256). Children's development is stimulated due to a greater accessibility to information made possible by telecommunications, the Internet, cell phones and computers (Patel, 2015:306). However, online interactions make children vulnerable to cyber bullying. In addition, media multitasking

is blamed for academic challenges, which occurs because of children watching TV or listening to music while working on their homework (Buck et al., 2018:1260).

2.3.2.5 Material domain

Material well-being relates to having access to enough food, adequate shelter, and other material possessions that are typically considered in terms of the standard of living in the community and culture in which one lives. Material well-being is highly dependent on the socio-economic situation of the family and the material care the child receives in the home (Minkinnen, 2013:551). Gross-Manos (2017:117) explains that knowing what children have in their homes provides an indication of their economic or material state. Children's material well-being is influenced by their living standard and the resources they have access to, for example their housing quality and their basic needs being met (Smith et al., 2013:84). Material well-being is seen as interrelated to educational well-being in that children who have the means to attend school have opportunities for feeling fulfilled and for securing quality employment in future, provided that the child perceives the school as a safe environment (Buck et al., 2018:1259, 1264). Chaudry and Wimer (2016:S23) note that the poverty rate is also an indicator of child well-being as it increases knowledge of how well the economy is functioning.

2.3.2.6 Safety and security domain

The safety and security domain comprises of the evaluation that an individual makes regarding their safety and the presence of structural risks in their community and in their physical environment. The characteristics of a community is a key factor determining how a child perceives the safety of his or her community. Feeling safe will enhance strong connections with the community; however, witnessing violence in the neighbourhood, domestic violence, or loss of human life are examples of traumas that result in the child perceiving the environment as being unsafe, which can lower a child's subjective well-being (Buck et al., 2018:1263). Experiences of belonging are important for children to develop a shared identity with their family and in the friendship group, and developing trust in social relationships is a significant factor in supporting their well-being (Fattore & Mason, 2017:280). Adams et al. (2019:550) emphasise that a safe environment should include both built and natural environments and assert that a lack of safe spaces in their communities to socialise with peers is a matter of concern.

2.3.2.7 Leisure time domain

Samuels, Dada, Van Niekerk, Arvidsson and Huus (2020:2) emphasise the importance of children's participation in daily activities, stating that participation in such activities provides "the context in which children develop competencies, where they gain an understanding of

their strengths and abilities, form friendships and relationships, and ultimately make a contribution to their worlds.” The authors specify leisure and informal physical community activities such as reading, listening to music, biking, and taking part in sport and outside activities as examples of daily activities. Leisure time enhances children’s physical and mental well-being as it involves physical activities as well as spending time with friends and family (Buck et al., 2018:1264).

The leisure time that parents spend with their children improves family bonds and leads to improved child well-being. However, it is often not possible for parents from poor families to spend time with their children due to having to work long hours to earn a living, having multiple temporary jobs, and/or not making enough income to allow for leisure time or activities. For most of these children, spending time doing school homework is what is considered as spending time with their parents (Buck et al., 2018:1264).

Adams et al. (2019:547, 550) highlight the importance of children’s experiences in nature and advocate for the creation of child friendly communities in which nature forms an integral part. Dopko, Capaldi and Zelenski (2019:134) refer to research studies that have shown that children enjoy spending time in nature as it enhances feelings of being relaxed and calm. In addition, children who spend time in nature experience enhanced psychological well-being as well as enhanced social skills and environmentally friendly attitudes.

In conclusion, domains of child well-being are rooted in theories of childhood, which increase their validity and make them practical for studying and tracking the well-being of children. Domains on children’s well-being is multifaceted and cover a broad range of perspectives (Ben-Arieh, 2011:462). This view is reflected in the ecological systems theory that explains that children’s immediate and wider environments influence their development and well-being (Louw et al., 2014:29).

2.4 FACTORS INFLUENCING CHILD WELL-BEING

The subjective evaluation of their well-being is influenced by children’s relationships and activities within their environment (Buck et al, 2019:1264; Minkkinen, 2013:549; Newland et al., 2019:395). When assessing children’s well-being, both their subjective assessment of their well-being and the resources available to them must be considered (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014:1). It is important to consider both protective and risk factors that can affect children’s well-being.

2.4.1 Protective factors for children’s well-being

Protective factors are described as internal and external factors that enhance the coping and adaptation capabilities of an individual when faced with adversity (Windle, 2011:157). Similarly, (Bezuidenhout, 2013:70) describes protective factors as characteristics of an individual or

environmental factors that mitigate or prevent the negative effects of risk factors that one is faced with. Protective factors can be present on three levels: the intrinsic, which refers to the individual's internal resources such as psychological, neurobiological and resilience aspects; the social, which refers to relationships with others, family cohesion or parental support; and community factors, for example economic and institutional factors (Windle, 2011:157).

Yule et al. (2019:407) describe protective factors as having “buffering effects on children’s health and well-being.” Also, protective factors reduce the possibilities of a child being re-exposed to risks, and present preventative interventions that provide opportunities for self-development. For example, a child who is not doing well at school, can be supported by family members, teachers or friends before the child decides to resort to being absent from school or avoiding doing his or her schoolwork (Parritz & Troy, 2018:42).

2.4.1.1 A positive family environment

The relationships in the family have been reported in several studies to have a substantial effect on children’s subjective well-being. Children perceive the quality of these relationships in terms of their satisfaction with the family’s relationships and interactions (Newland et al., 2019:401, 409). The significant role of the family in children’s well-being is ascribed to the family as being the primary context in which children live and are cared for (Fattore & Mason, 2017:279). Family cohesion, supportive and emotionally available family members, and positive relationships with siblings and other family members are some of the characteristics of a family that can protect a child from risks (Parritz & Troy, 2018:42). A positive and resilient family is associated with stronger family relationships and positive personal growth of its members (Newland, 2014:1339). Mashford-Scott et al. (2012:235) state that satisfying relationships give children a feeling of being valued and increase the probability of them coping during adverse situations.

Newland (2014:1339) asserts that parents’ physical and mental health and well-being play a critical role in children’s well-being because parental health has an impact on the entire family system. Parents’ sense of competence and positive communication in the family showed a strong association with children’s development and well-being (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:814). Parental support, engaging in conversations with parents, frequently having family meals and parents reading to their children are some of the variables that enhance children’s life satisfaction (Buck et al., 2018:1255; Kim et al., 2019:13).

Furthermore, the family and other relatives are important because they offer children care and a sense of belonging, trust and happiness (Fattore & Mason, 2017:278-279). One way of family support comes when grandparents or other unemployed family members spend time with and assist in the care and support of the children (Hall & Richter, 2018:24).

2.4.1.2 Socio-economic status of the family

The family's socio-economic status has a strong influence on the type of opportunities that children become exposed to (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:812). Families can enhance the well-being of their members by providing economic support and physical resources such as shelter, food and clothing (Department of Social Development, 2021:2). Parents who are economically healthy have the capacity and the resources to improve their children's lives, for example by placing their children in schools with adequate resources and providing in recreational opportunities (Casas & Frönes, 2019:3).

2.4.1.3 A positive neighbourhood and community

Several studies have confirmed that the quality of the neighbourhood environment is a significant factor in determining children's well-being and that their subjective well-being is positively influenced if they perceive the quality of their neighbourhood as good. High-quality neighbourhoods that can serve as a protective factor are characterised by sufficient green spaces, safe neighbourhoods and playgrounds, accessible recreational centres, low levels of community violence, and well-equipped infrastructure; factors that were found to promote children's after-school activities and outdoor play (Louw & Louw, 2014a:431; Wang, Cheng, Jiang & Zhou, 2023:1616). Bento and Dias (2017:157) state that playing outside exposes children to much needed natural elements such as sunlight and fresh air that boost their immune system, bone development and physical activity. Also, children's engagement in physical activities reduces the risks of being overweight and enhances their sense of autonomy and self-esteem. Flannigan and Dietze (2017:53) elaborate on the importance of children playing outside. They assert that outdoors there are objects and materials that children can find intriguing and would want to explore. This sense of exploration can lead children to making their own discoveries, which enhances creativity, planning and the formation of new ideas. Interactions with friends in their neighbourhood contribute to children's well-being by enhancing their physical fitness, social inclusion, mental health, cognitive functioning, and satisfaction with their life (Wang et al., 2023:1617). Because of this, child-friendly neighbourhoods that can be accessed by all children living in the community can contribute to children's subjective well-being (Wang et al., 2023:1617-1618).

Another key point that Idang (2015:98-99) and Papazoglou (2019:2625) make, is that communities are influenced by culture, which is the way a particular community or group of people conduct themselves. Each community has its own set of cultural norms that are practiced. The functioning of communities and society has an impact on children's current development and on their potential to become future members of society. In the face of hardships, communities and culture can serve as buffering elements (Norris, Stevens,

Pfefferbaum, Wyche & Pfefferbaum, 2008:145). The functioning of communities and society has an impact on children's current development as well as their potential to become productive future members of society. Another point to note, is that children do not fully comprehend what a community is. To a child, a community is his or her friends in the neighbourhood and in school (Buck et al., 2018:1255).

2.4.1.4 Positive and supportive social relationships

Social well-being entails an individual's mental and social health which can be attributed to positive interactions with other people and in the environment (Rahdarzadeh & Adibisedeh, 2016:194). Social interactions with others are so critical that when they are positive, they bring a sense of happiness and when they are negative, they tend to affect the person's psychological well-being negatively (Branscombe & Baron, 2017:32). Children can interact with parents and siblings, with their peers at school and in their community. Friendships offer children a social network that contributes to a sense of belonging through feelings of being accepted, and experiencing equality, familiarity, a shared identity and trust in one another (Fattore & Mason, 2017:280).

Children can also experience a sense of belonging and companionship from the pets that they own. Research has demonstrated that pet owners experienced reduced levels of loneliness and isolation while their mental and physical health improved. This effect is attributed to pets being able to offer unconditional love and support without imposing judgement (Bennetts, Crawford, Howell, Burgemeister, Chamberlain, Burke & Nicholson, 2022:17). Interactions with pets or companion animals, which can include dogs, cats, horses, and rabbits or other rodents, have been found to promote children's physical and emotional health and reduce their levels of depression, anxiety and psychological stress in the same or even in a better way than what humans can do (Purewal, Christley, Kordas, Joinson, Meints, Gee & Westgarth, 2017:2). These effects are ascribed to the emotional support, positive relationships and attachment, affection and acceptance that children gain from their interaction with pets. However, there are psychological costs that a child endures in the case of the pet's death, which could lead to psychological distress such as anxiety and depression (Bennetts et al., 2022:17).

2.4.1.5 A positive school environment

Considering that school-aged children spend most of their time at school, their social and emotional well-being are enhanced when they feel connected to their peers, have a sense of belonging in school, and have caring teachers (Kim et al., 2019:13-14). Jennings (2015:733) views caring teachers as those teachers who are empathetic and skilled at being able to offer emotional support to children as they understand that their students' academic achievement is also dependent on the student's home environment. The support offered by a teacher can

create a healthy classroom environment which can lead to a child's academic, social and emotional enhancement. In addition to assisting children in acquiring and developing essential cognitive abilities, teachers also provide emotional support to students who encounter challenges in their learning or in their interactions in the classroom (Van der Kaap-Deeder, Vansteenkiste, Soenens & Mabbe, 2016:239).

2.4.1.6 Exposure to nature

Van Dijk-Wesselius, Maas, Hovinga, Van Vugt and Van den Berg (2018:15) point out that green spaces such as parks and gardens are necessary elements of healthy communities that children should be exposed to. When well created and maintained, green spaces invite children to engage in play, learning and interaction with nature. When children play in green spaces, a sense of connectedness to nature develops and children who feel connected to nature tend to exhibit prosocial behaviours. Adams et al. (2019:556) found in their research study that children viewed environmentally friendly areas as those areas that children can work in and plant vegetables, with the community members assisting and taking turns with them. The children who participated in their research also emphasised the importance of the areas being secure and safe.

In maintaining green spaces, previous causes that led to the contamination of green spaces should be addressed to prevent future environmental degradation (Greene & Greene, 2009:1020). Patel (2015:295) points out that such efforts could also be part of sustainable livelihood strategies where human capital such as skills, knowledge and labour are used in creating income and, in the process, saving the environment. Main (2014:453) notes that personality traits are influenced by how a person learned to respond to environmental factors during early childhood through being socialised in his or her environment.

2.4.1.7 Intrinsic factors

Resilience is an important protective factor for children's well-being. Resilience is a process where an individual has access to as well as the capacity to engage in multiple resources to deal with adversities, resulting in better-than-expected outcomes (Van Breda, 2018b:4). Resilient children are characterised by good health, strong cognitive abilities, a positive self-esteem, a sense of personal competence, feelings of belonging, good problem-solving and social skills, empathy with others, and faith and spiritual values (Louw & Louw, 2014a:431; Van Breda & Theron, 2018:243). Resources that can support resilience include family support, food and shelter, supportive school environments, community safety, community facilities and cultural factors (Savahl et al., 2013:580; Van Breda & Theron, 2018:243).

A child's personality is also considered to be related to his or her well-being. Children's subjective well-being differ according to their personality as personality influences how they view things. Personal characteristics used to measure personality include extraversion, agreeableness, emotional stability, conscientiousness and openness. Factors such as knowing aspects that will easily irritate them, knowing how to comfort others, and being able to start conversations with others or able to make friends depend on the child's personality (Goswami, 2014:125). Children who do better in their schoolwork or during adverse conditions and are able to execute developmental tasks well are those with agreeable personalities and who are able to regulate their emotions as they are aware of their emotions. Children with these characteristics can connect well with others and tend to explore their world (Parritz & Troy, 2018:41). These intrinsic factors or characteristics can serve as protective factors for a child.

Socio-demographics characteristics such as gender, age, education level and ethnic background have been linked to subjective well-being (Goswami, 2014:120). Dinisman and Ben-Arieh (2016:565) highlight that children of different ages evaluate their well-being differently. Those who are above the age of 10 years tend to evaluate their well-being as less satisfying than younger children. Subjective well-being can also be influenced by whether the child resides in his or her country of birth or not. Casas and Frönes (2019:4) add that, in terms of gender, girls' subjective well-being tends to relate more to relational factors, body image and self-image than that of boys.

Yule et al. (2019:421) state that "protective factors can be conceptualized as one end of a continuum that is anchored on the other end by risk factors." In the next section, some of the risk factors that affect children's well-being will be discussed.

2.4.2 Risk factors affecting children's well-being

Risk factors can be described as the circumstances that children experience or find themselves in that have a negative effect on them and can lead to negative outcomes. These factors include individual risks as well as risks in the family and/or in the child's community or social settings (Naidoo & Muthukrishna, 2016:4). Social risk factors also encompass elements linked to the child's broader surroundings, such as schools and friends, neighbourhoods and socioeconomic status, as well as racial, ethnic, and cultural traits (Parritz & Troy, 2018:39).

2.4.2.1 Family risks

Children are viewed as vulnerable and they depend on their parents, family or caregivers to socialise them to behave in a socially acceptable manner. When parents do not fulfil this role, children are at risk for negative outcomes such as misbehaving (Bezuidenhout, 2013:75). The

ecological systems theory shows that the family is influenced by the broader social, economic and cultural contexts, in which factors such as poverty, unemployment, poor service delivery, poor infrastructure, crime and violence can affect the family's capacity to care for its members (Department of Social Development, 2021:182, 184). The well-being of children is influenced by with parenting practices. It has been found that children raised by harsh, inconsistent, unresponsive, and neglectful parents perform poorly across most developmental domains (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:813).

Parents' mental health plays a significant role in children's well-being. Parents who show signs of psychopathologies as well as parents with a conflictual relationship are regarded as risk factors in the family. Children raised by parents who have been diagnosed with psychopathologies are more vulnerable to being directly or indirectly affected by the parents' mental health challenges (Parritz & Troy, 2018:38).

In addition, family structure is associated with children's subjective well-being. Studies show that children who do not live with both biological parents present lower subjective well-being. Single-parent households and other family types are more like to experience lower income levels and higher risks of poverty as well as lower connections with schools and other support systems (Dinisman, Andresen, Montserrat, Strózik & Strózik, 2017:107). Children coming from marginalised families are at higher risk of exposure to community adversities that may have long term effects on their well-being (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:812). In some instances, violence has been used as ways to solve conflict in their own homes, spreading to their communities and even wider levels. Unfortunately, violence does not only leave psychological scars, but also leads to lack of resources, inequalities and injustices (Lombard, 2014:52).

2.4.2.2 Poverty and poor socio-economic circumstances

Poverty is a complex issue with multiple dimensions that, due to its social construction, can be described in a variety of ways (Davids & Gouws, 2013:1203). Poverty can be described as a condition where there is a lack of resources to meet basic human needs such as food, safe drinking water, proper sanitation, and access to health care services and education. Furthermore, poverty is characterised by a lack of income that would enable people to access quality health care and social services, while it robs people from opportunities for attaining education and employment (Twikirize, 2014:56).

Environmental issues that lead to social and economic marginalisation of people are among the many variables that contribute to poverty. To mention a few, these variables include war, political change, drug misuse, incarceration, death of the main provider in the home, physical or mental illness and gender discrimination (Patel, 2015:292). Davids and Gouws (2013:1203) explain that causes of poverty can be understood as due to economic, cultural and political

factors or because of illness or misfortune, while some may perceive being poor as a consequence of their own actions. Poverty is one of the significant risk factors contributing to the incidence of abuse, mental disorders, poor nutrition and low school performance, and has long term effects on the social, physical, and emotional well-being of children and families (Patel, 2015:367). Also, poverty leaves people with low self-dignity, social isolation and exclusion and a sense of powerlessness; leading to the inability to function positively in society (Twikirize, 2014:56). When children view themselves as living in impoverished environments, it can lead to feelings of depression, which harms their mental health (Nahkur & Kutsar, 2019:358). Poverty or poor socio-economic status (SES) has “repeatedly been shown to be one of the most robust predictors of child and adult adjustment” (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:812).

Economic hardship because of poverty negatively affects the quality of parenting that parents can provide for their children. Psychological distress, maternal depression, behavioural and social problems experienced by parents have been associated with economic hardships, which in turn impedes on children’s well-being. Children’s well-being is negatively affected as these adversities affect parent-child interactions, parenting behaviour, and children’s development (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:814).

Children born in poverty are vulnerable to negative cognitive and educational outcomes. Poor performance in schools increases the risk of a girl child becoming a teenage mother. Growing up in poor communities also adds other challenges, for example children attending low-quality schools and come from families who experience unemployment and low income. In addition, these challenges can result in children being victims of negative peer influence (Chaudry & Wimer, 2016:24). Children from low-income households are also frequently excluded from school-related events like field excursions since they lack the appropriate school uniform (Main, 2014:468).

Poverty is related to overcrowded homes (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:812). One of the resources that poor families lack in the home is electricity, which leads to them resorting to risky alternative ways of accessing electricity that place them and the nearby communities at risk. The lack of safety operational knowledge, negligence and faulty equipment are some of the reasons for fires, which lead to accidental burns (Kimemia, Van Niekerk, Govender & Seedat, 2018:969-970).

2.4.2.3 Negative community environments

Neighbourhood characteristics that influence children’s well-being include aspects such as safety, the availability of outdoor recreation and play areas for children, and the social connectedness among its residents (Newland et al., 2019:398). A lack of safe spaces in the

neighbourhood limits children's social interactions with peers (Adams et al., 2019:550). Poor neighbourhood quality has been found to affect children's long-term health and lead to psychological problems, delinquency and poor subjective well-being (Wang et al., 2023:1616-1617).

At-risk families tend to face common adversities, one of which is living in unsafe neighbourhoods (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:812). Exposure to and witnessing violence in their communities have wide-ranging psychological and behavioural effects that can affect children's well-being. These effects include anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, aggression and anti-social behaviour, academic problems, poor peer relationships, substance abuse and suicidal behaviour (Affriniti, Suárez & Simpson, 2018:636; Nahkur & Kutsar, 2019:356; Yule et al., 2019:406).

Considering the vital role of experiences in nature for children's subjective well-being, it is concerning that studies show a decline in children's engagement in their natural environment (Adams et al., 2019:550; Dopko et al., 2019:127). Benefits of playing in natural spaces include improved physical and motor skills as well as enhanced social and mental well-being in children. These benefits suggest that exposure to nature is especially important for children living in urban areas (Buck et al., 2018:1260; Smith et al., 2013:84). The immediate and the natural environment are affected by aspects such as air pollution and pollution of playgrounds in children's neighbourhood (Minkinnen, 2013:555; Smith et al., 2013:84). In a wider context, children's well-being is affected by natural disasters and climate change, which widen existing inequalities in society (Lombard & Viviers, 2014:80).

2.4.2.4 Negative peer relationships

Children's social environment typically includes their friendship group in their neighbourhood and school (Buck et al., 2018:1255). Peer relationships form an important part of children's well-being. Children's interactions with peers in their social environment, including school, are influenced by having a group of friends and positive interactions with peers, engaging in things such as talking and fun activities, and experiencing that friends appreciate them (Newland et al., 2019:398).

Bullying and violence in schools pose serious threats to children's well-being (Horton, 2014:49). Negative interactions in the school environment, for example being bullied and/or excluded by other learners, affect children's sense of safety at school and different aspects of their subjective well-being such as their self-image, life satisfaction and mental health (Newland et al., 2019:398). Buck et al. (2018:1260) warn that children's increased use of digital platforms increases their risks to cyberbullying. Cyberbullying, like face-to-face bullying,

put children at risk for academic difficulties and mental health issues such as depression and social challenges.

2.4.2.5 Adverse childhood experiences

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are described as “potentially traumatic events that can have negative effects on health and well-being” and include, amongst others physical, emotional and sexual abuse, physical and emotional neglect, and adverse experiences in the household such as substance abuse, domestic violence and mental illness of a household member (Boullier & Blair, 2018:132-133). Pataky, Báez and Renshaw (2019:639, 641) include bullying, personal victimisation and discrimination as ACEs, and mention that ACEs have consistently been linked to negative health and mental health outcomes during childhood, which result in social, emotional, behavioural and academic problems that further tend to influence their well-being into adulthood. Children who grow up in at-risk families and environments, such as those living in low-income urban neighbourhoods, are more likely to be exposed to multiple risk factors (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:812; Pataky et al., 2019:641). Pataky et al. (2019:642) note that ACEs are often underreported; therefore, relevant professionals who can intervene are often not aware of a child’s exposure to these circumstances.

2.4.2.6 COVID-19 as a risk factor

COVID-19, which is defined as “a disease caused by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-COV-2)” had a severe impact on the world’s healthcare systems and spread to many facets of people’s lives (Nicola, Alsafi, Sohrabi, Kerwan, Al-Jabir, Iosifidis, Agha & Agha, 2020:186). The lockdown safety measures for dealing with the virus put all children, but especially those with disabilities, those with chronic illnesses, migrant children and those living in low socio-economic conditions, at great risk. During the lockdown restrictions, children were vulnerable to violence in the immediate environment and had limited access to resources due to the decrease in family income. Depending on the social and economic background of the family, some children did not have access to school (Montserrat, Garcia-Molsosa, Llosada-Gistau & Sitjes-Figueras, 2021:2).

The economic challenges families suffered, increased mental health problems such as depression and anxiety while children’s physical activities lessened due to lockdown measures, resulting in them being exposed to frequent screen time (Montserrat et al., 2021:2). Most countries in the world had resorted to closing schools to deal with the pandemic (Alon, Doepke, Olmstead-Rumsey & Tertilt, 2020:1). The adoption of this strategy occurred at the expense of children from poor families as, for many, schools had been the only providers of nutritious food on the days that children go to school (Corburn, Vlahov, Mberu, Riley, Caiaffa,

Rashid et al., 2020:5). Nicola et al. (2020:186) highlight the same point and add that school closure due to the pandemic resulted in social isolation and many children dropping out of school. They further highlight the increase in the gap between the poor and those coming from high income families. Children from high income families continued to attend school online due to having resources to do so, while those from low-income families fell behind in their schoolwork. During the lockdown regulations, parents were faced with home schooling their children. However, parents who were not confident that they were capable of home schooling their children experienced anxiety because of the concern that they had over their children's future (Nwosu, 2021:3). During the easing of the lockdown restrictions, when children were allowed to return to school, some children were unable to return due to financial constraints that their families endured (Nicola et al., 2020:186).

Findings in the research conducted by Nwosu (2021:9) indicate that the pandemic resulted in children being cared for by parents whose mental health was negatively affected. Lockdown regulations set by governments prevented parents from seeking employment or forced them to work reduced hours, resulting in earning less income. This situation caused further anxiety for the parents (Nwosu, 2021:11-12). Furthermore, mothers who work remotely from their homes experienced challenges in terms of childcare as parents had to perform their employment duties as well as caring for their children. As a result, many parents developed depressive symptoms.

In conclusion, Ayala-Nunes et al. (2018:815) state that many factors in children's proximal and distal contexts have a direct or indirect influence on different dimensions of their well-being. The ecological perspective described by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Louw et al., 2014:29) formed the theoretical framework of the study and provides an understanding of the influence of conditions in the different ecological levels on children's well-being. Yule et al. (2019:407) suggest that protective factors can improve children's adjustment despite the level of stressors they have been exposed to and recommend that governments and welfare services focus on promoting protective factors to enhance children's well-being.

2.5 LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORKS FOR PROMOTING CHILD WELL-BEING

Every country offers a variety of child and family laws that are structured and provided in completely diverse ways, that enforce unique child and family laws, and implement unique social policies. These laws play a fundamental role in their development and the well-being of children (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:814). The following passages discuss these varied laws from international, regional and local frameworks.

2.5.1 International frameworks

The discussion of international legislative frameworks will focus on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015).

- **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)**

The rights of children have been agreed upon and recognised in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (United Nations, 1989). The CRC acknowledges the vulnerability of children and captures the civil, economic, social, political and cultural rights of children around the world as stipulated in international conventions (Preamble, United Nations, 1989). Ben-Arieh et al. (2014:3) state that the CRC is “a legally binding normative instrument setting the standards for children’s well-being in a series of domains of life.” The CRC highlights, amongst others, the best interests of the child as a primary consideration in all actions that concern children (Article 3); the right of children to express their own views in all matters affecting them (Article 12); children’s right to protection against all forms of harm (Article 19); their right to health and adequate nutrition (Article 24) and their right to an adequate standard of living (Article 27). Furthermore, the CRC stipulates the provision of education, especially primary education, by governments regardless of children’s economic background (Article 28) (United Nations, 1989). The CRC recognises the importance of relationships within the family for children to grow up in a family environment characterised by love, happiness and understanding (United Nations, 1989, Preamble).

The CRC thus encompasses all aspects of child well-being, as the rights outlined in the CRC offer avenues for improving children's economic and emotional well-being, their material, social and cultural environments, their mental state, as well as their potential and their development (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014:1). Therefore, policies aimed at improving children's well-being should be guided by the CRC's views on children's rights (Casas & Frönes, 2019:2). Children's rights are an investment in their futures (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014:15), therefore, defending these rights is linked to children's sustainable futures. The CRC has been approved by all the member states of the African Union (Sloth-Nielsen, 2017:427).

- **The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015) links to the well-being of children. The United Nations (2015, Section 13) refers to the goal of sustainable development as follows:

Sustainable development recognizes that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, combating inequality within and among countries, preserving the planet,

creating sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and fostering social inclusion are linked to each other and are interdependent.

These goals are set in response to the injustices suffered by people in various parts of the world. Seventeen goals are stated to encourage different countries to address poverty, climate change, inequalities, and support the provision of education, health and security for all. When addressing these issues, countries are encouraged to take into consideration their local contexts (Lombard, 2015:483; United Nations, 2015:9, 11).

Achieving success in the social, economic, and environmental development domains – the three pillars of sustainable development – is a prerequisite for the promotion of well-being for people of all ages (Nunes, Lee & O’Riordan, 2016:3; United Nations, 2015:4). Vision 8 and Vision 23 of the 2030 Agenda, respectively, aim for the creation of a world that will invest in children and the empowerment of vulnerable groups that include children and youth (United Nations, 2015). Several of the 17 SDGs directly affect children, as indicated by Bhardwaj, Sambu and Jamieson (2017:22) that “[c]hildren are at the heart of the 2030 Global Agenda” through a vision that children will realise their full potential, rather than only survive. Objectives that relate to enhancing children’s well-being include ending poverty, hunger, malnutrition, poor living conditions and poor access to services, and promoting a safe and sustainable environment, clean air, a good education as well as promoting gender equality.

2.5.2 Regional frameworks

Two regional frameworks that focus on the well-being of African children will be discussed in this section, namely the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) (African Union, 1990) and Agenda 2063, the Africa We Want (African Union, 2015).

- **The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child**

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) was drafted to address the rights of children living on the African continent (African Union, 1990). The ACRWC is “recognised as the principle human rights instrument dealing with children’s rights on the continent” and is seen as including issues on children’s rights that were omitted from the CRC (Sloth-Nielsen, 2017:424-425). The ACRWC plays a critical role in promoting children’s well-being by addressing issues that impact children in African cultures. In its preamble, the ACRWC highlights the “unique and privileged position” that children hold in African society and emphasises that everyone has a duty to care for children in a way that promotes their physical, mental, social, and moral development as well as their health. Furthermore, it is stated that children should live in an environment of freedom, security, and dignity (African Union, 1990). The ACRWC is an essential tool to guarantee that African children receive care that will enhance their emotional, physical, mental, and moral well-being (Hansungule &

Boezaart, 2017:45). The four pillars of the ACRWC are regarded as follows: children's rights to non-discrimination, the principle of best interests of the child, their right to survival and development, and their right to participate in matters concerning them (Sloth-Nielsen, 2017:429).

- **Agenda 2063, the Africa We Want**

The focus of the second regional mandate - Agenda 2063, the Africa We Want - is growth and sustainable development for the benefit of all Africans (African Union, 2015:1). Agenda 2063 focuses on "the socio-economic and socio-political well-being of Africans [and] highlights among its aspirations the valorisation of good governance, democratic values, respect for human rights, gender equality, role of law, [and] defence of the environment" (De Oliveira & Otavio, 2021:345). In its vision, Agenda 2063 sets seven aspirations (African Union, 2015:6). Of these, Aspiration 6 notes that all citizens must be actively involved in social, economic, political as well as environmental development so that "Africa will be a continent where "no child, woman or man will be left behind" (African Union, 2015:7).

2.5.3 National or local frameworks

In this section, three key local legislative frameworks will be discussed: The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, the Children's Act 38 of 2005, the National Development Plan.

- **The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996)**

The rights of the people of South Africa are enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996 (Republic of South Africa, 1996). The Constitution provides the supreme framework to guide the implementation of all policies and legislation in South Africa (Department of Social Development, 2021:54). The Constitution also informs the citizens of South Africa of their rights and responsibilities, amongst others, those enforceable by the law such as the right to housing, health care, and to food and social security (Patel, 2015:83). Children are regarded as a vulnerable group in South Africa (Department of Social Development, 2013:30). The Bill of Rights in the Constitution includes provisions for protecting children's rights by specifically outlining children's rights in Section 28 of the Constitution. These rights include their rights to a name and nationality, to a family, parental care or suitable alternative care when removed from the care by the family, their rights to basic nutrition, shelter, basic health care, and social services, as well as their right of being protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse, or degradation (Republic of South Africa, 1996). The right of all people to education is stipulated in Section 29. Bhardwaj et al. (2017:24) note that all rights in the Constitution are indivisible and interdependent to ensure children's development and survival. The protection of children's rights is furthered by other South African legislation, for

example the Children's Act, the Child Justice Act, the Sexual Offences Act, and the Schools Act (Ozah & Skelton, 2018:49).

- **The Children's Act 38 of 2005**

The Children's Act puts the provisions of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa into practice and lays out guidelines for the protection and care of children (Children's Act 38 of 2005, Preamble). The Act recognises that children are a group vulnerable to adverse conditions and endorses the rights of children stipulated in the Constitution, Section 28 (Songca, 2011:344). The Children's Act sets out measures to protect individuals under the age of 18 against maltreatment, provides statutory procedures to protect children's rights, and emphasises the ideal that children should grow up in a positive family environment, with parents taking responsibility for their children's care (Ozah & Skelton, 2018:50; Patel, 2015:210). In agreement with the Constitution, child participation and the best interests of the child are embraced (Songca, 2011:344). Article 9 describes the best interest of the child as being paramount in all matters concerning the protection and well-being of the child, while Article 10 states that all children of a suitable age should be permitted to participate and voice their opinions in matters pertaining to their lives (Children's Act 38 of 2005).

- **The National Development Plan**

The primary objective of South Africa's National Development Plan (NDP), which was introduced in 2012, is to end poverty and reduce inequality to secure a better future for all South Africans and their offspring (National Planning Commission, 2012:1, 24). The NDP is one of the national frameworks that are intended to prescribe comprehensive services for families so that children's optimal development and protection can be secured (Martin, Hall & Lake, 2018:114). These services will include health care, housing, water, sanitation, early childhood development and education as well as reducing unemployment, securing food security of households, and creating safer communities. Seventy-four percent of the SDG indicators are addressed in the NDP (Statistics South Africa, 2018:31). In Chapter 11, one of the goals of social protection indicates that "all children should enjoy services and benefits aimed at facilitating access to nutrition, health care, education, social care, and safety" (National Planning Commission, 2012:72).

Apart from the above, the *White Paper on Families in South Africa* (Department of Social Development, 2013) offers a national policy framework to enhance the well-being of families and the children in their care (Martin et al., 2016:114). The White Paper is intended to provide a response to the inequalities in South African society, such as a lack of sufficient income that impedes on children's rights of access to quality health care services, education and nutrition

(Savahl, Adams, Isaacs, September, Hendricks & Noordien, 2015:213). The Revised White Paper on Families in South Africa was drafted in 2021 (Department of Social Development, 2021).

The above policy and legislative frameworks are some of those that promote children's well-being. Their goals share similarities such as addressing poverty, education, family security and children's protection, which are key to children's well-being. Various suggestions are made for the state to address the above issues. For example, the government can implement poverty alleviation measures by determining the number of people who need social assistance and by planning how the assistance will be distributed (Hall, 2019:221). Social assistance can include the Child Support Grant (CSG) and can be provided together with free health care. The CSG has been found to enhance positive health, nutritional and educational outcomes for children (Patel, Knijn & Van Wel, 2015:379-380). In the next section, the well-being of children in South Africa will be highlighted.

2.6 THE WELL-BEING OF SOUTH AFRICAN CHILDREN

The international, regional and local legislative frameworks discussed in the preceding section all contribute to the well-being of children. Despite the policies that the government has put in place, its citizens still find themselves in living conditions marked by wide-spread inequality where the rich and poor communities are separated. Therefore, large numbers of children in South Africa live in adverse conditions that affect their well-being and sustainable futures for them. While rich communities have high income levels, employment and access to quality health services and education, poor communities are characterised by high levels of unemployment, substance abuse, crime and violence (Savahl et al., 2015:216).

It has been over 25 years into South African democracy and yet many children's well-being is still compromised by widening levels of inequality (Lake et al., 2019:32). Even though South Africa has made notable progress toward implementing the SDGs, which aim to ensure everyone's well-being, many children remain trapped in impoverished situations (SAHRC & UNICEF, 2016:5). Due largely to inequality - for example, differences in wealth and poverty, between urban and rural areas, and between racial groups - many South African children are exposed to adverse childhood experiences such as poverty, hunger, abuse, inadequate education, poor health, violence, non-communicable diseases, and climate change, among other things (Lake et al., 2019:32; Nelson Mandela Children's Fund, 2023:50; Rees & Main, 2015:30; SAHRC & UNICEF, 2016:5). South Africa has an estimated child population of 20 million or 34% of the total population of 60 million people (Hall, 2021/2022:164a), which highlights the need to enhance children's well-being.

Poverty is a critical factor that affect South Africa's families and children. Analysing children's well-being through financial and material indicators showed that 62.3 percent of children between the ages of 0 and 17 lived in low-income households, with children from female-headed households being more likely to do so (Statistics South Africa, 2018). To improve the financial well-being of children, the Child Support Grant (CSG) was introduced by the government in 1998 to assist parents in lower-income households with meeting their children's basic needs. Children who receive the CSG benefit in many ways, for example in terms of their physical health, learning, behaviour, social services, and material conditions. Nevertheless, a substantial portion of South African children remain impoverished, and a large portion of households experience unemployment and deprivation such as low family income and restricted access to educational resources (Casas, 2011:569; Conti & Heckman, 2012:5). Therefore, the economy affects different aspects of children's lives due to challenges faced by the family (Department of Social Development, 2021:4).

The well-being of children is furthermore negatively impacted by the quality of the home environment, which is influenced by factors such as family breakdown, domestic and gender-based violence, absent fathers, and single-parent households (Department of Social Development, 2021:16-17; Patel, 2015:200; Richter, Desmond, Hosegood, Madhavan, Makiwane, Makusha, Morrell & Swartz, 2012:3). Statistics South Africa (2018:8) reports that young girls and women remain victims of sexually violent crimes which leave the number of such crimes committed to be amongst the highest in the world. Children in South Africa are still faced with the challenge of crimes such as sexual violence, murder, assault with intent to cause grievous body harm, and common assault (Department of Social Development, 2021:20; Kleintjes, Abrahams, Yako, Lake & Tomlinson, 2021/2022:33; Savahl et al., 2013:581).

The quality of health care received by children and families is still deemed poor due to poor infrastructure of public hospitals and clinics and, in response during his budget speech in 2019, Mr Tito Mboweni announced that R717 billion was allocated for health services, including the National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF) that will ensure that everyone has access to quality health care services (Mboweni, 2019:13). However, the government's plan on implementing the NHIF has been criticised for not having commenced, nor having any confirmed time of commencement (Proudlock, Hansungule, Westwood, Reynolds, Lloyd, Ncube, London, Maker & Bertscher, 2019:19). Some authors also express concern that, although the proposed National Health Insurance Bill aims to provide children with equitable access to health care, the most vulnerable children may not benefit from the Bill. These children include those living in rural areas, those who do not have birth certificates, and children of undocumented foreign persons (Proudlock, Nuathi, Lake, Harding & Hansungule-Nefale, 2021/2022:21).

Social and economic inequality in South Africa makes it difficult to implement the 2030 Global Agenda (Lombard, 2015:484). Many South Africans still experience the inequalities brought about by apartheid and, because of this, South African children are particularly vulnerable while the country's socioeconomic profile indicates that the government is unable to address the issues affecting children (Van Breda & Theron, 2018:237, 244). Social workers could play a role as advocates for enhancing child well-being and sustainable futures for children.

2.7 SOCIAL WORKERS AS ADVOCATES FOR CHILD WELL-BEING

By adopting the White Paper for Social Welfare in 1997, South Africa has changed to social development as a national welfare approach for promoting the well-being of the entire population. Working from a developmental approach, social workers seek to advance social change and people's well-being within their social environments by integrating social and economic developmental goals (Patel, 2015:127; Van Breda, 2018:66-67). The intention of developmental social work is to recognise and challenge structures that discriminate against people and oppress their economic, political and social functioning (Lombard, 2015:482). Social development is thus a multidimensional process of change that is aimed at promoting the economic, social, political and cultural well-being of the people of South Africa (Patel, 2015:124).

Developmental social work advocates for people's rights and challenges oppressive systems that maintain inequality and poverty, and hinder economic opportunities (Lombard, 2014:50). Marginalised individuals who are unable to form part of policy making, have found ways and strategies to make their voices heard and form part of policy making (Lane & Pritzker, 2018:49). Social workers working according to developmental social welfare follow a multidisciplinary approach that involves other professionals such as mental health care services professionals in promoting social change amongst individuals and families. Social change is promoted taking into account respect for the rights of service users while also facilitating participation from them (Patel, 2015:127).

According to the guidelines provided in the White Paper on Social Welfare and the Integrated Service Delivery Model, the Department of Social Development (DSD) formulated the Framework for Social Welfare Services to address socio-economic development in South Africa (Department of Social Development, 2013:50). Social work services focus, amongst others, on enhancing human capacity, empowerment and social inclusion; the protection and promotion of human rights; and enhancing participation and involvement of communities in social welfare interventions to protect vulnerable groups, of which children are one (Department of Social Development, 2013:13, 30). There are various intervention levels of

service delivery, depending on the needs and challenges of the service users (Department of Social Development, 2013:29):

- Prevention services are delivered to prevent the development of social needs into risk factors or challenges. Interventions focus on primary prevention by building the capacity, resilience and self-reliance of service users and creating conditions to support their well-being (Department of Social Development, 2013:29). Services are more of universal in nature as it focuses on factors that affect the population, for example chronic poverty, life skills, substance abuse, and poor school attendance and academic performance (Patel, 2015:208).
- Early intervention services are aimed at the early identification of existing risks, behaviours and symptoms that could affect people's well-being. Interventions include preventive and secondary prevention strategies to bring about change in individual, societal and environmental factors that impact people's well-being. The aim is to prevent the progression of social problems (Department of Social Development, 2013:29).
- Statutory intervention, residential/alternative care processes are aimed at assisting individuals who can no longer function sufficiently in their community. The services aim to safeguard the well-being of the service users and can also involve rehabilitative and continued care (Department of Social Development, 2013:29-30), for example placing a child in alternative care due to abuse at home. Statutory processes are relevant where the intervention has reached a level where legal processes must be executed in the protection of the child (Patel, 2015:207).
- Reunification and aftercare services involve psychosocial support, care and assistance to reintegrate people into family and community life. Service users are supported to restore their independence and optimal social functioning (Department of Social Development, 2013:30; Patel, 2015:207).

Developmental social work enhances awareness of the self and the power that individuals already possess. Children can, for example, be empowered to participate in programmes that will have positive effects on their lives, which requires opportunities that will involve not just participation but meaningful participation (Lane & Pritzker, 2018:91).

It is evident that social work service delivery to enhance children's well-being should ideally focus on preventive interventions, where the capacity of children and their families or caregivers should be built, and conditions be created to enhance children's well-being. Interventions for enhancing children's well-being have shown to have better chances of being

effective if child welfare services incorporate families and form positive relationships with them (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:813).

Interventions should be based on principles such as non-discrimination, transparency, accountability and human dignity (Androff, 2016:26). Non-discrimination means that everyone who needs intervention should be included regardless of their gender, race, religion and socio-economic background (Twikirize, 2014:57). Participation means that, since people are the experts of their own lives, they should be included in the planning of the intervention processes from the planning phase until termination. This approach leads to people having a sense of responsibility and accountability (Androff, 2016:41). Transparency means being open with processes during interventions, which also assists in the prevention of corruption and oppression (Grobler, Schenck & Mbedzi, 2013:254).

Empowering people to become change agents in their lives can be achieved by enhancing their understanding of their social situations and using opportunities available to them to better their lives, thereby ensuring that the interventions are socially and environmentally relevant (Patel, 2015:123). Also, it is critical that social workers should not assume that working from an African perspective is relevant to all African people as social structures, political, economic and cultural contexts vary in African groups (Spitzer, 2014:15). In terms of this study, understanding service users' social contexts links well with the ecological systems theory guiding the study as it supports considering the individual and the environment when seeking an understanding of the child (Burns et al., 2015:250).

Van Breda (2019:422) highlights that "the core social work value of social justice" that emphasises the equality of all members of society can be linked to Ubuntu. Ubuntu is the defining worldview of the indigenous Black peoples of Sub-Saharan Africa and is based on the notion that "it takes a village to raise a child." As a result, Ubuntu promotes the notion that children can reach their full potential through the interaction shared by their families and their community members. Ubuntu's three main tenets - respect for the environment, regard for oneself, and regard for others - all work together to advance human well-being (Mugumbate & Cherini, 2019:28-29). Hence, Ubuntu should be considered by social workers when providing prevention and early intervention interventions.

Something to take into consideration in terms of equity and equality is the point made by Hensels, Sherr, Macedo, Roberts and Tomlinson (2016:101) who state that previous research has focused on girls more than on boys. In these studies, it emerged that girls need to be empowered more. The authors caution that the focus should not only be on girls as such an empowering process may disadvantage boys. They also highlight that gender roles can hinder opportunities within societies. Patel (2015:301) elaborates on this by explaining how gender

roles can impede on progress by describing how time to care for and spend with children can be reduced for mothers when they reside in a place where their work and basic services such as water are far from their homes. Fetching water and travelling long hours to and from work can increase the burden on women, especially in contexts where it is accepted that it is a role that must be occupied by women.

In addressing such challenges, the social work profession is faced with difficulties in the achievement of their goals. The profession does not receive the recognition that it deserves. This is displayed by the poor working conditions and remuneration, a lack of resources, and poor professional status. Another challenge is that social work practices are based on using prescribed material that is based on European developed countries making the intervention processes irrelevant to non-European countries (O'Leary, Young, McAuliffe & Wismayanti, 2019:4-5). High numbers of statutory services caseloads are also a challenge (Gray & Lombard, 2023:431). Furthermore, language becomes a barrier with regards to communicating with service users when a different language is spoken and other professionals such as psychologists may also overshadow the status of social workers (O'Leary et al., 2019:4-5). Some social worker professionals do not have a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities required by the developmental social work approach. These factors impede on effective services being delivered (Patel, 2015:248). Social work roles are described by Patel (2015:142-145) as enabler, facilitator, educator, counsellor, mobiliser, networker and advocate, amongst others. Social workers must therefore have a thorough understanding of the different social work roles.

2.8 THE CHILD IN MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

The inclusion criteria for participants of this study were determined as children who are between the ages of 8 and 12 years, therefore children in middle childhood. Children in this life stage go through various changes with regards to their physical, emotional, cognitive and social development that allow them to better understand their environments (Louw & Louw, 2014b:225). Purewal et al. (2017:1) note that childhood and adolescence are critical developmental stages in terms of the quality of their health, socio-emotional well-being and learning across the life span. As children's developmental stage has an influence on their thoughts and behaviours (Henderson & Thompson, 2016:32, 37), the researcher needed to be familiar with the developmental characteristics of the child in middle childhood.

2.8.1 Physical development

The physical development of children involves their physical growth, the development of gross and fine motor skills, and visual and brain development. Their balance, strength, mobility, fine and gross motor skills, vision and eye-hand coordination all improve because of their physical

development (Berk, 2013:178; Henderson & Thompson, 2016:32; Louw & Louw, 2014b:227). In this life stage, children's vision is generally well developed, and they develop permanent teeth as they lose their milk teeth. Some might experience visual problems such as near-sightedness that can negatively affect their schoolwork and other aspects of the child's life (Louw & Louw, 2014b:226).

It is crucial to remember that every child develops differently. Girls typically reach developmental milestones related to height and weight sooner than boys. However, due to having more muscle tissue and due to gender roles and social and cultural values, boys are perceived to be stronger than girls. Due to the development of their motor skills, children in middle childhood like to run, jump, play soccer and netball, and do gymnastics, to name a few. Participation in such activities can enhance children's self-esteem (Henderson & Thompson, 2016:32-33; Louw & Louw, 2014:225-226).

Although children in this developmental stage do not have the stamina like those in the adolescent stage, their capacity for concentration is the same. During middle childhood, the brain grows to the weight and size of a typical adult brain (Louw & Louw, 2014:226). Important development occurs in the frontal lobes of the brain, which are the brain areas related to reasoning, understanding and regulating emotions, problems solving, planning and impulse control. The increase in connections in the brain promotes transmission of information and enhances the child's learning capacity (Henderson & Thompson, 2016:33-34; Louw & Louw, 2014:226).

Louw and Louw (2014:228) point out that there is little research on child sexuality in middle childhood. These authors highlight that toward the end of the stage, gender identity is usually firmly established. Children in this stage can tell which gender a person is even though the person is dressed in clothes normally worn by a different gender. They tend to play with peers of the same gender; hence adults think that children at this stage do not have any interest in their sexuality.

2.8.2 Cognitive development

Cognitive development refers to children's thinking and reasoning skills. Children in the middle childhood are regarded as being in the concrete operational stage; one of the stages coined by Jean Piaget in his cognitive development theory. This is the stage where children can solve problems, engage in conversations, understand reversibility and perform operations such as adding, subtracting, division and multiplication. They are also able to find their way around unfamiliar environments. Furthermore, their cognitive development enables them to organise items according to height, colour, shape, size; however, they require the use of concrete aids for learning purposes (Henderson & Thompson, 2016:37; Louw & Louw, 2014:230). During

middle childhood, children develop the ability to understand cause and effect and are also less egocentric as they gain the capacity to see things from other people's perspectives (Henderson & Thompson, 2016:37-38; Martorell, Papalia & Feldman, 2014:360).

Children learn academic skills like writing, reading, and maths during middle childhood, and their memory, focus, and attention span also grow during this time (Berk, 2013:6; Henderson & Thompson, 2016:37). Their vocabulary increases and they use longer, more intricate sentences, showing their strong command of language (Louw & Louw, 2014:234; Martorell et al., 2014:291). Additionally, they can discern between appearance and reality, recognise motives and causes of situations and behaviours, rationalise, and organise their thoughts (Arnett, 2016:300; Martorell et al., 2014:276, 283). Children begin to understand space around the age of eight, and they can show this understanding in their drawings and descriptions; an ability known as "map skills" (Berk, 2013:251).

Middle childhood is the time "when children develop a better grasp of what the physical world is really like and what is and is not possible" (Arnett, 2016:300). However, the sociocultural environment in which they are raised will have an impact on their cognitive development and skills (Arnett, 2016:368; Martorell et al., 2014:379-381). Louw and Louw (2014:234), for example, note that research studies indicate that the socio-economic status of the family can contribute to a child having a poor or good working memory.

2.8.3 Social development

Children's social world broadens considerably during middle childhood, encompassing their school, peers, and community. Additionally, they acquire the knowledge and abilities that are relevant to their specific cultural context (Arnett, 2016:23; Louw & Louw, 2014:257, 299; Martorell et al., 2014:395). Important to take note of, is that there are various socialisation agents that influence their social development, including the family system, peers, media, schools, teachers and random events such as accidents, success and death (Louw & Louw, 2014:265). During middle childhood, children become less dependent on their parents when it comes to seeking assistance for doing their homework, dressing themselves and making choices in making friends (Louw & Louw, 2014:262). At the same time, their family and parents continue to be extremely important to their lives and development (Louw & Louw, 2014:299). Their well-being is increased by having good relationships with their parents, siblings and peers (Henderson & Thompson, 2016:43).

Friendships gain significance during middle childhood, with a particular emphasis on the faithfulness and loyalty of friends. An essential component of their socioemotional health is peer acceptance (Louw & Louw, 2014:276, 299). Peer acceptance refers to viewing one another as a worthy friend and is influenced by the adolescents' social skills (Berk, 2013:618).

Their interactions with friends are characterised by more prosocial interactions in which they use their social and emotional knowledge in their communication with one another (Berk, 2013:610).

In their interactions in their social environment, children in middle childhood acquire an enhanced comprehension of themselves and others, including ideas about people, communities and interpersonal connections (Berk, 2013:5-6; Louw & Louw, 2014b:233, 255). They get a better sense of who they are, assess how they compare to their peers, and can articulate the internal, psychological, external and social aspects of the self (Louw & Louw, 2014b:257). Additionally, they learn to differentiate between their 'real' selves, or who they are, and their 'ideal' selves, or who they would like to be (Louw & Louw, 2014:256-257).

Erikson's theory of psychosocial development states that children in middle childhood are in the stage of industry and inferiority, where they acquire the academic, practical, social, and physical skills necessary to adapt to an adult world (Henderson & Thompson, 2016:41). They find fulfilment in engaging in and completing purposeful tasks and strive for acknowledgement when they create something (Martorell et al., 2014:395; Thomas, 2005:93). Children are more likely to feel like they have mastered a task when they are given tasks they can complete and receive proper guidance from adults (Arnett, 2016:23; Martorell et al., 2014:395; Thomas, 2005:93).

A factor to consider in children's social development, is the child's culture. Culture is defined as a way of living that a group adopts, agrees on, and that is learned and shared, including agreed upon norms, values, traditions and laws and knowledge (Henderson & Thompson, 2016:47). As indicated in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, the macro system is one of the ecological systems that must be considered in understanding children's development. It was indicated that the child does not participate in this system, however, factors such as laws in the system influence and affect the child (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013:5). One of the laws that affected children was enforced by the government in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, where lockdown measures were enforced and children were forbidden to have contact with others outside of the home or attend school (Montserrat et al., 2021:1).

2.8.4 Emotional development

During the middle childhood years, children develop the capacity to understand complex emotions and situations that cause emotions, and they can recognise and identify emotions based on the facial expressions of others (Berk, 2013:419; Louw & Louw, 2014:260). Between the ages of 6 and 8, children begin to contemplate their feelings in their minds (Berk, 2013:412). They can discuss their own feelings, realise that they could feel more than one

emotion at a time, and recognise situations that cause them to experience either positive or negative emotions (Berk, 2013:415-416; Louw & Louw, 2014b:259).

As their capacity for emotional self-regulation grows, they can use techniques like problem-solving or, if it is not feasible, distress control by the time they are 10 years old (Berk, 2013:412; Martorell et al., 2014:395). The elementary school years are a time when children's empathy grows. They become more adept at recognising cues that indicate other people's emotions, responding to distress in others, and understanding others' emotions (Berk, 2013:417, 419; Martorell et al., 2014:395).

Children who are emotionally skilled are said to have developed emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is the ability to be aware of one's own emotions, manage them, and be aware of other people's emotions while handling interpersonal relationships (Weiten & Hassim, 2016:290). Children who are emotionally intelligent have less behavioural challenges, easily make friends, perform well at school, and are more resilient (Louw & Louw, 2014:261).

2.8.5 Moral development

Moral development generally refers to the ability to distinguish between right and wrong. In middle childhood, children develop the capacity to understand rules and, to their own advantage, tend to accept and obey the rules set by persons in power (Henderson & Thompson, 2016:45; Louw & Louw, 2014b:291). Children's moral development will be influenced by the norms and values in their family and culture, parenting practices, schooling, peer interactions, and the development of empathy (Berk, 2013:504-505; Louw & Louw, 2014b:294). During middle childhood, children internalise norms and standards related to good behaviours and prosocial skills (Berk, 2013:513).

Based on the developmental characteristics of children in middle childhood, it was expected that the participants in the study would be able to provide their views on child well-being. Their language and reasoning abilities, understanding of social situations and social rules, and their exposure to the wider social environment, amongst others, were considered as factors that would enable them to provide relevant information on the topic.

2.9 SUMMARY

Chapter 2 provides a literature overview on the topic of child well-being and key concepts related to it. Information on aspects such as definitions of well-being and child well-being, domains of child well-being, protective and risk factors that can impact child well-being, legislative frameworks related to child well-being, the potential role of social workers in enhancing children's well-being, and the developmental characteristics of children in middle childhood forms a background to the presentation of the research findings in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Children's well-being has in the past mostly been researched from the perspectives of adults and professionals such as parents or caregivers and experts such as social workers, psychologists, teachers and paediatricians (Casas, 2019:334). Thereby, children's views have been ignored and apparently deemed unimportant; however, more researchers are of the view that perspectives on child well-being need to be informed by children themselves (Lloyd & Emerson, 2017:594). The increased focus on children's rights legislation, child development theories and a transition aimed towards positive social science led to an interest in the inclusion of children's' perspectives in research (Savahl et al., 2017:1). Lloyd and Emerson (2017:594) believe that it is imperative to assess well-being from children's and adolescents' perspectives as it was found that their views differ from adults' perspectives. In this study, the researcher explored children's perspectives on child well-being. The research methodology, ethical considerations and the empirical findings of the study are discussed in this chapter.

3.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology is described as the procedures followed for collecting, analysing and describing data in a research study (Nieuwenhuis, 2019a:58). The methodology that guided this study will be discussed in this section.

3.2.1 Research paradigm and approach

Well-being is socially and culturally constructed, and the meaning assigned to it will depend on individuals' subjective views (Mashford-Scott et al., 2012:235; Minkkinen, 2013:4). A research paradigm refers to a set of assumptions that result in a specific view of the world, and interpretivism views reality as a social construct that is not objectively determined (Nieuwenhuis, 2020a:58, 67). The study was therefore based on an interpretivist research paradigm as the aim of the study was to explore child well-being through the eyes of a sample of children to gain a better understanding of the topic. The study sample included children between the ages of 8 and 12 years.

Since the researcher wished to collect data on the participants' perceptions and experiences related to child well-being, a qualitative research approach was followed (Fouché, 2021a:40). Through this research approach, the participants could provide verbal descriptions of their views about the research phenomenon as experienced within their social settings (Nieuwenhuis, 2020a:59). Furthermore, qualitative research is most appropriate for studying phenomena that is not well known (Rubin & Babbie, 2012:79), which relates to the topic of

children's subjective well-being. This research approach enabled the researcher to understand rather than explain child well-being, and to collect data in the participants' own words (Anney, 2015:272). However, a limitation of qualitative studies is that the research findings cannot be generalised to other settings (Anney, 2015:272; Schurink et al., 2021b:393).

The study had an exploratory and descriptive purpose. This study was guided by an exploratory purpose as the researcher aimed to gain insight into the phenomenon of children's subjective views regarding their well-being (Fouché, 2021b:65). An exploratory study was relevant as limited research on children's subjective well-being was conducted as their well-being was often studied by obtaining the perspectives of adults (Casas, 2019:334; Lloyd & Emerson, 2017:594). Descriptive research is intended to depict the data that are collected in a study (Fouché, 2021b:65; Neuman, 2014:38). In line with descriptive studies, the empirical findings of the study are presented in themes and sub-themes in point 3.4 of this chapter.

3.2.2 Type of research

In terms of the two types of research, basic research has the primary goal of expanding and elaborating knowledge and understanding of a phenomenon while applied research seeks to apply knowledge gained from a research study to find solutions and bring forth interventions to address an issue or problem (Bless et al., 2013:389; Bentley, Gulbrandsen & Kyvik, 2015:690). The type of research appropriate to the study was applied research. The rationale for the relevance of applied research, is that the research findings could advance an understanding of children's views on child well-being, which might guide social work interventions and inform policies that promote child well-being (Bless et al., 2013:389; Fouché, 2021b:58; Rubin & Babbie, 2012:145). Relevant interventions and policies could promote sustainable futures for children.

3.2.3 Research design

A research design involves the decisions involved in planning and implementing the research study (Schurink et al., 2021a:290). In this study, a case study research design was adopted as the researcher relied on the participants sharing their views on a topic related to a real-world context, and data were collected using face-to-face interviews to ask 'how' and 'why' questions to obtain in-depth information from the participants (Nieuwenhuis 2020b:89-90; Padgett, 2017:36). The case, as indicated by Schurink et al. (2021a:302), is bound by the unit of analysis and by time. In this study, data were collected from a sample of children over a period of four months in 2023 within a specific context (the areas of Brits and Rustenburg in the North West Province).

Different types of case studies are described in the literature (Nieuwenhuis, 2020b:90-91; Schurink et al., 2021a:302-303). For this study, the instrumental case study described by Nieuwenhuis (2020b:90-91) was seen as appropriate for exploring the participants' perspectives on child well-being. The mentioned author states that this type of case study is used to provide insight into a problem or issue by means of an in-depth exploration, with the case being of secondary interest and may not be regarded as typical of other cases. The instrumental case study was relevant for providing insight into an issue, namely child well-being in a specific social context.

3.2.4 Research methods

Research methods are the tools that the researcher utilises to collect data about the social reality, with interviewing stated as one of the tools (Nieuwenhuis, 2020a:57). The research methods for the study included the study population and sampling method, data collection and data analysis, the pilot study, and measures to enhance the trustworthiness of the research findings.

3.2.4.1 Study population and sampling

The study population refers to a collection of individuals who are regarded as knowledgeable about the phenomenon being studied and from whom the findings of the study will be deduced (Levy & Lemeshow, 2013:16). The goal of the study was to explore the perspectives of children in middle childhood on child well-being within a South African context. As such, the study population included children in middle childhood living in South Africa. The target population is seen as the population from which the study sample is recruited (Bless et al., 2013:164). In this study, the child participants were from the Brits and Rustenburg areas in the North West Province

Being a qualitative study, a non-probability sampling method was used in this study. The participants were selected according to a set of inclusion criteria based on the assumption that they could provide relevant information about the research topic (Nieuwenhuis, 2020b:93; Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan & Hoagwood, 2015:539). Purposive sampling was used to recruit the research participants as this sampling focuses on selecting participants according to pre-determined inclusion criteria based on the assumption that the participants would be likely to produce rich data on the phenomenon being studied (Neuman, 2014:274; Strydom, 2021:382). The inclusion criteria for this study were as follows:

- Children between the ages of 8 and 12.
- Children who can converse in English.

- Children whose parents or guardians provide permission that the children in their care may participate in the study
- Children who provide their assent to voluntarily participate in the study.

The researcher further made use of snowball sampling to gain access to potential participants. Snowball sampling is used when researchers are not familiar with the target population (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014:63; Strydom, 2021:383). She asked parents and guardians in her social circle residing in two communities, namely Brits and Rustenburg, to introduce her to parents or guardians of children who complied with the sampling criteria and who would provide permission for their child to voluntarily participate in the study. The first parent/guardian contacted in each area was requested to help the researcher to contact other parents/guardians who would allow their children to participate in the study, while the sampling criteria were upheld. The contact details of parents/guardians who agreed that their children would willingly participate in the study were given to the researcher, who subsequently contacted them, provided them with details of the study, and explained the aspects of informed consent and assent to them. Furthermore, the researcher was able to lessen the caregiver's concerns with regards to the types of questions that would be directed at their children.

Some parents declined to have their children participate in the study, even though the researcher explained the purpose of the study to them, as they believed that the questions were meant to probe their personal issues in their homes. A final sample of 10 participants who complied with the sampling criteria were recruited - eight from the Brits area and two from the Rustenburg area. This sample was sufficient for data saturation to occur, as will be discussed in the next section.

3.2.4.2 Data collection

Data were collected using semi-structured face-to-face interviews. As a data collection method that is useful for gaining participants' perspectives on a topic and exploring information in more detail, the face-to-face interviews enabled the researcher to gain in-depth information from the participants in that the researcher could ask questions and use follow-up questions to gain more in-depth information (Bless et al., 2013:197; Geyer, 2021:356, 358). The interviews were guided by an interview schedule (See Appendix A). The interview schedule or guide contained a set of predetermined open-ended questions, which enabled the researcher to explore the predetermined questions (Geyer, 2021:358; Mafokane & Shirindi, 2018:40). Thereby, the researcher had an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon that were studied (Rubin & Babbie, 2012:168), thus on the participants' perceptions on child well-being. Although English was not the participants' first language, they were able to converse in English, even though the sentence construction at times was imperfect.

Children's subjective well-being is a multidimensional construct (Minkkinen, 2013:549; Newland et al., 2019:395). As the child participants might not be able to understand the range of factors involved in child well-being, visual communication cards (see Appendix B) were used in conjunction with the interview schedule. The cards were compiled after consulting literature on domains of child well-being, for example a family, home, food and school, and thus focused on information related to the research topic. The visual communication cards were introduced after the open-ended questions of the interview schedule were completed so that the data would be based on the participants' own views as much as possible. Visual materials can enhance the richness of the data collected (Nieuwenhuis, 2020b:103-114). The researcher observed that the participants were able to identify additional aspects of child well-being after the visual cards were introduced.

The interviews were digitally recorded with the permission of the participants and their parents or guardians. The interviews were transcribed as soon as possible after the interviews (Nieuwenhuis, 2020b:110). Listening to the recordings and doing the transcriptions helped the researcher to determine whether sufficient information has been collected. In this way, the researcher could also determine that data saturation occurred. Data saturation was achieved when the interviews produced no new information on the research topic (Makofane & Shirindi, 2018:34).

3.2.4.3 Pilot study

A pilot study is a critical part of the research to pre-test the research methodology and the resources that the main study will require, such as time and costs (Bless et al., 2013:394; Malmqvist, Hellberg, Mllås, Rose & Shevlin, 2019:2). In addition, the pilot study enhances the data quality as the researcher can review challenges that can hinder the quality of the main study, such as researcher bias and the data collection and sampling methods utilised (Malmqvist et al., 2019:3; Ismail, Kinchin & Edwards, 2018:2). Furthermore, Ismail et al. (2018:4) suggest that conducting a pilot study enhances the researcher's confidence with regards to data collection procedures, especially when data collection involves human interaction. The pilot study also allows the researcher to determine ethical and practical issues, such as the wording of questions, researcher bias and stereotypical views that can impede the research goals (Ismail et al., 2018:4; Makofane & Shirindi, 2018:42). The pilot study is therefore a way to ensure that the researcher can ethically safeguard the participants and their human rights and determine whether the study is feasible (Van Wijk & Harrison, 2013:571).

With the pilot study, the data collection method was found to be effective to obtain relevant data as no changes were needed to the interview questions or visual prompts (Geyer, 2021:358; Nieuwenhuis, 2020b:103). It was determined that the interview questions were

mostly understandable; however, some questions and terms had to be explained in more detail to some of the participants. For example, the terms “community”, “environment” and “programmes” required further explanation as the children did not understand them. Also, the researcher noticed a need to ask aspects of question 6 separately. In the question “*What can children do in their homes, in their community, and for the environment to improve their own well-being?*” the researcher asked the questions on the home, community and environment as separate questions.

Ismail et al. (2018:4) suggest that the sample size of the pilot study should be 10% of the main study. The pilot study for this study was conducted with two participants who met the sampling criteria. Based on the pilot study, the researcher listed some ways in which to explain certain concepts to the participants, which were used as needed in the interviews with the participants. The data collected during the pilot study were excluded from the empirical findings that will be presented in this chapter.

3.2.4.4 Data analysis

Nowell et al. (2017:2) note that it is important for researchers to indicate how data were analysed as it contributes to the trustworthiness of the study. In this study, the researcher firstly transcribed the recordings of the data collection interviews in textual format and organised these into files, allocating a pseudonym to each participant (Nieuwenhuis, 2020c:135). The text was then analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic data analysis is a meticulous method of identifying themes and sub-themes from the similarities and contrasting perspectives of the research participants (Clarke, Braun & Hayfield, 2015:224; Nowell et al., 2017:2).

According to Willig (2022:67, 69), there are different ways of approaching the process of thematic data analysis and that considering the research question will enable the researcher to identify themes, compare themes, and theorise a phenomenon based on the themes. Taking the research question of this study into account, the researcher followed the six phases of thematic data analysis described by Clarke et al. (2015:230), namely familiarisation, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up the research findings.

Phase 1: Familiarisation

Familiarisation involves that researchers obtain an in-depth knowledge of the data by reading through the entire data set (Clarke et al., 2015:230). Once the researcher collected and transcribed the data, she began familiarising herself with the data by reading and rereading the entire data set while considering its relevance in terms of the research question and

objectives of the study (Willig, 2022:69). During this process, she read through all the data transcripts, asking reflective questions and making notes on her thoughts to allow her to notice existing patterns in the data (Clarke et al., 2015:231; Lochmiller, 2021:2032; Nowell et al., 2017:5).

Phase 2: Coding

After immersing herself in the data, brief notes in the data transcripts were made to code text that appeared to be answering the objectives of the study (Clarke et al., 2015:235). In following the suggestion by King (2004 in Nowell et al., 2017:6), a three-table column was drafted: in one column, the objectives of the study were documented; in another column, relevant quotes from the data were inserted next to those objectives, and in the third column, the assigned codes were written. In some instances, more than one code was assigned to the same quotes as they represented more than aspect of the topic, while some codes that appeared to be irrelevant and did not answer the research question were shifted to a separate page in case they would be used (Nowell et al., 2017:8; Willig, 2022:70). This process of coding and labelling assisted the researcher to identify possible themes and sub-themes in the data.

Phase 3: Searching for themes

Phase 3 involved searching for potential themes in the data by linking relevant codes and insights contained in the data (Nowell et al., 2017:8; Willig, 2022:71). Similar codes were combined to construct a theme that conceptualises the central idea of these codes. A theme attaches meaning to similar views or experiences cited by the participants, while it is also important that the themes must address the research question and objectives (Nowell et al., 2017:8). The information in the three columns mentioned in Phase 2 assisted in the construction of a thematic map or table according to which overarching themes and sub-themes could be visually shown (Braun, Clarke, Hayfield & Terry, 2019:844-845; Clarke et al., 2015:236).

Phase 4: Reviewing potential themes

Next, the themes and sub-themes were refined by assessing their relevance to answering the research question (Nowell et al., 2017:9). Codes that were found to repetitive or lacked adequate data were merged, eliminated or constructed into a new theme or sub-theme (Clarke & Braun, 2013:121; Nowell et al., 2017:9-10). The purpose of this step was to provide a general understanding of the various themes and sub-themes and how they work together to produce a unified story of the research findings and answer the research question (Clarke et al., 2015:238; Nowell et al., 2017:9-10).

Phase 5: Defining and naming themes

This phase is intended to provide the reader with a clear idea of what each theme is about (Clarke et al., 2015:240; Nowell et al., 2017:10). Therefore, the objective of this stage was to demonstrate the uniqueness of every theme (Braun et al., 2019:846:). To effectively convey the intended content, the theme name must be succinct, distinctive, and immediately recognisable to the reader, and theme descriptions should comprise concise explanations of the themes' limits and scope (Clarke et al., 2015:240; Nowell et al., 2017:10). To achieve this objective, the researcher ensured that each theme was provided with a clear and descriptive name to convey an idea of the focus of the theme and contained a brief description to explain the scope and boundaries of the theme.

Phase 6: Writing the report

The sixth phase comprises of the concluding analysis and writing of the research report and forms an essential component of data analysis (Clarke et al., 2015:241; Clarke & Braun, 2013:121). The researcher strived to present an interesting and truthful picture of the research findings by providing direct quotes from the data collection interviews. These quotes were selected to present patterns found in the data to demonstrate the relevance of the themes (Clarke et al., 2015:242; Nowell et al., 2017:11). To bolster the study's strengths, information from the literature review was integrated in the discussion of the findings to provide a clear presentation to the reader (Nowell et al., 2017:10-11).

Researchers are responsible for ensuring data quality as thematic analysis present with a risk of inconsistency and a lack of coherence (Nowell et al., 2017:2-3). This risk compels researchers to attend to the trustworthiness of the research findings.

3.2.4.5 Trustworthiness

Measures to improve trustworthiness are important for researchers to enhance the acceptability and usefulness of the qualitative research findings (Nowell et al., 2017:3). Trustworthiness was implemented by the researcher to ensure the quality of the data, which indicates the participants' viewpoints are objectively represented (Bless et al., 2013:236). Considerations for trustworthiness include the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Nowell et al., 2017:3; Schurink et al., 2021c:393).

- **Credibility**

Credibility involves the researcher ensuring that the research findings are sound in that the findings are presented to accurately represent the participants' views on the topic (Nowell et al., 2017:3). Credibility was enhanced by the researcher adopting and motivating the

appropriate research methods and research design to answer the research question (Bless et al., 2013:236; Nieuwenhuis, 2020c:144). By continuously engaging in a process of *reflexivity*, it was ensured that the participant's perspectives were presented based on the data collected from them and not on the researcher's personal biases (Lietz & Zayas, 2010:192). Furthermore, *peer debriefing* was done through frequent debriefing sessions held with the research supervisor to ensure credibility (Nieuwenhuis, 2020c:144; Nowell et al., 2017:3).

- **Transferability**

Nieuwenhuis (2020c:144) notes that generalisation is not the objective in the case of qualitative research, hence, the participants are not randomly selected. The participants in this research study were selected based on meeting certain sampling criteria. Therefore, in a qualitative study, transferability refers more to individuals or readers who can connect the findings as relevant to their context, which requires *purposeful sampling* and a *thick description* of the participants, context, and research design in order for the reader to establish if the findings can be transferred to his or her own context (Anney, 2014:278; Nieuwenhuis, 2020c:145; Nowell et al., 2017:3; Padgett, 2017:36).

Utilising a case study design, the researcher provided a description of the participants and context in the sampling procedures and description of the study sample. The participants were selected to allow the researcher to obtain rich perspectives from a sample of children in relation to their well-being. As a thick description of the processes followed in conducting the study was described, professionals, readers, and other researchers interested in child well-being can judge the transferability of the findings.

- **Dependability**

Dependability is achieved when the researcher can demonstrate the research process by *clearly documenting* the research design and by providing detailed information on data collection and data analysis (Nieuwenhuis, 2020c:145; Schurink et al., 2021b:394). Nowell et al. (2017:3) emphasise that researchers should do so logically and in a traceable manner so that a fellow researcher can be able to assert how the researcher arrived at certain decisions, analyses, and interpretations of the findings. A comprehensive discussion of the research methodology was presented in this chapter, which can enable readers to judge the study's dependability.

- **Confirmability**

The confirmability of a study is enhanced by ensuring that the findings are attributed to the participants' views and not the bias and assumptions of the researcher (Nowell et al., 2017:3). Being aware of one's biases and assumptions and taking active measures to eliminate them

can enhance the confirmability of the study, which includes measures such as reflexivity and peer debriefing (Lietz & Zayas, 2010:197; Nieuwenhuis, 2020c:145; Schurink et al., 2021b:394). Confirmability can also be enhanced by including direct quotes in the research findings to present the participants' views (Nieuwenhuis, 2020c:146). These strategies were implemented by the researcher while conducting the study, as mentioned in the discussion of data quality.

3.3 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Babbie (2017:63) highlights that ethics is underpinned by knowledge and involves conforming to conduct and ways that are agreed-upon as being proper or improper. Ethical considerations relate to moral principles, research procedures and methods that guide the actions of social researchers (Strydom & Roestenburg, 2021:118). Ethics protect human dignity, justice, equality and the rights and welfare of the research participants (Mogorosi, 2018:75; Strydom & Roestenburg, 2021:118). The participants in this study were children between the ages of 8 and 12 years. Mogorosi (2018:84) states that children are considered a vulnerable population; hence, it is important that researchers portray a higher level of sensitivity and consideration of ethical principles.

3.3.1 Permission for the study

It is crucial that proper research standards and ethical practices must be adopted to protect the research participants, the researcher and the research institution. Ethical standards also foster a sense of accountability and culturally sensitive practices during the research process. Hence, it is important that approval from the relevant institution's ethics committee is obtained by the researcher prior to commencing with the research to ensure that proper protocols are observed during research projects (Maree, 2020:48; Mogorosi, 2018:75; Pillay, 2014:202-203). Pillay (2014:203) notes that some university institutions view child study projects as vital but require novice researchers to conduct such studies with the supervision of experienced researchers. In this study, the researcher conducted the study with the guidance of a research supervisor.

The study formed part of a group research project for a master's coursework programme in which students individually conducted studies on the research topic. Before starting with the research, ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Pretoria (refer Appendix C).

3.3.2 Voluntary participation and informed consent and assent

Participation in research studies should be voluntary and participants should never feel forced to take part in a study (Maree, 2020:48; Strydom & Roestenburg, 2021:121). Informed consent

means that research participants partake in the study project with a full understanding of the risks and obligations of taking part, without being coerced. To obtain informed consent implies that the participants should be informed about the study, including the goal of the study, what procedures will be followed, possible risks as well as advantages of the study, and their right to withdraw from the study at any point in time, so that they can make an informed decision to participate in the study or not (Bless et al., 2013:30; Maree, 2020:48; Strydom & Roestenburg, 2021:122). For children under the age of 13, parental consent for the child to participate in the research is required. Parents should first be approached to provide consent before the child can be approached to indicate whether he or she is willing to participate voluntarily in the study. Following the parents' consent, the researcher must also obtain assent from the children. Children can provide informed assent by the researcher explaining the mentioned aspects of the study in age-appropriate language in a letter of informed assent (Maree, 2020:48; Strydom & Roestenburg, 2021:122).

As described in the sampling procedures for this study, parents or caregivers were firstly approached to gain their consent before the child participants were asked whether they would voluntarily participate in the study. The researcher explained in detail the rationale of the study verbally as well as in the letters of consent to the parents and caregivers (refer Appendix D). The procedures of the research project, such as voluntary participation and the data collection method, the rights of the child, benefits, possible risks and the possibility of individual counselling free of charge, should it be needed, were explained to the parents. In the case where parents gave consent, the researcher also consulted with the children and explained the information in the informed assent form (refer Appendix E) to obtain voluntary participation. It was arranged that the data collection interviews would be conducted on a different day than that of the discussion of the details of the study with the parents. This process enabled both the parents and the participants to make an informed decision about participation in the study (Mafokane & Shrindi, 2018:33).

Consent should be confirmed again just before data collection, where the researcher clearly discusses the research project with the research participants (Abrar & Sidik, 2019:186; Strydom & Roestenburg, 2021:122). Prior to data collection, the researcher should demonstrate the principle of respect by requesting informed consent from the participants and eliminate fears that they might have with regards to the research project (Mafokane & Shrindi, 2018:41; Pillay, 2014:197). Furthermore, the participants' choices should be respected and, if providing consent, they should be informed of their right to withdraw from the research at any stage of the study without having to explain themselves (Babbie, 2017:64).

Before starting the data collection interviews, the researcher read through the informed assent forms together with the participants to make sure they fully understood what the research was about, what would be expected of them, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. This process proved to be advantageous as the researcher could address possible thoughts that the researcher was like a teacher who expected only the right answers from them. The researcher was able to explain in detail what research is and to assure them that the answers that they were providing were important and all correct. It was noticed that the participants were often excited about taking part in the study when they were informed that their views will assist social workers and other professionals to enhance the well-being of all children. However, the researcher decided not to continue interviewing two children during this process as they expressed their desire to not participate in the study, even though their parents had given their consent.

3.3.3 Avoidance of harm

Researchers must avoid harm to research participants by guarding against aspects that could psychologically harm them (Babbie, 2017:64; Bless et al., 2013:29). Implementing measures to ensure that participants are not harmed protects the participants and also the researcher, the profession, and the institution, and lessens the probabilities of participants refusing to partake in future research conducted by the institution or researchers (Mogorosi, 2018:76).

With vulnerable groups, avoidance of any physical and/or emotional harm is especially important (Bless et al., 2013:33-34; Strydom & Roestenburg, 2021:119). The study involved children as research participants and, although the focus was on the well-being of all children and not on the participants' own experiences, it was recognised that emotional distress could occur because of discussion of the topic. The parents or caregivers were also informed and reassured that the questions that will be asked would not focus on the children personally or on their home situation. Therefore, with the help of parents or guardians in the recruitment of participants, it was ensured that children who were deemed too vulnerable were not included in the study sample (Babbie, 2017:63; Strydom & Roestenburg, 2021:120). Before commencing the study, the researcher arranged for telephonic or online counselling free of charge with a registered clinical psychologist in private practice. This arrangement ensured that the well-being of participants who experience emotional distress due to their participation in the study would be attended to (Maree, 2019:49; Strydom & Roestenburg, 2021:125). However, none of the participants were found to need follow-up counselling after completion of the data collection interviews.

At the start of each data collection interview, the researcher and the participant read through the informed assent letter. The participants were made aware of the nature of their

participation in the study and were ensured that they could withdraw from the study at any time and did have to answer questions, should they wish to do so, and that their wishes would be respected without any negative consequences for them (Babbie, 2017:66; Strydom & Roestenburg, 2021:120). During the interviews, the researcher closely observed the participants for possible signs of discomfort. The researcher ensured that the child is not harmed by respecting the child's wishes when indicating that he or she is unable or not willing to talk about a specific aspect, as in the example when a child spoke about the importance of children praising God:

Researcher: "What is the reason for praising God?"

Participant 7: (Long pause) "I absolutely don't like talking about it, because I'm gonna cry."

Researcher: "Okay. Okay No."

Participant 7: "Yah."

Researcher: "Okay. Then let, let's not talk about it then. Yah. Let us not talk about it."

On the other hand, the principle of beneficence was also considered. Participation in a study could benefit the participants when knowing that the research findings could possibly contribute to the well-being of other children (Bless et al., 2013:29; Strydom & Roestenburg, 2021:121). The participants were in the developmental stage of middle childhood, where doing something meaningful can contribute to their own well-being (Martorell et al., 2014:395; Thomas, 2005:93). As mentioned, it was observed that the participants were pleased when hearing that their views could inform social services that could benefit other children.

The study was conducted towards the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, and special arrangements had to be made for the participants' wellness. To prevent physical and/or emotional harm to the participants and researcher, special measures aligned with the guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic were followed:

- The researcher and the participants wore protective face masks that always covered their mouths and noses.
- A personal distance of 2 meters was maintained.
- Hands were disinfected with a suitable disinfectant when meeting and during the interview, as needed.
- Interviews were conducted outside or in a room with an open window or door, with no other persons in the immediate environment.
- Writing materials or the communication cards were not shared. Communication cards were duplicated for each child.
- The work surface was disinfected before and after each interview.

These measures as well as measures related to the avoidance of harm and to beneficence were stated in the letters of informed assent and consent.

3.3.4 Confidentiality and anonymity

The research principles of anonymity and confidentiality are inseparable (Bless et al., 2013:33; Makofane & Shrindi, 2018:33). Anonymity and confidentiality mean that the researcher must protect the participants' identities throughout the research process, for example by using pseudonyms and not their names, and not using any identifiable information of the participants in the research report or publications. These measures are especially important when the participants are children as they might not be too concerned about protecting their identities (Abrar & Sidik, 2019:187; Bless et al., 2013:33). In this study, the participants were informed that their names would not be made public as their views were important for the study. During transcription of the data collection interviews, the participants were distinguished by indicating them by the number of participants in numerical order, for example, Participant 1, Participant 2 to Participant 10. Therefore, only the researcher would be able to link a specific participant to a specific response (Strydom & Roestenburg, 2021:124).

Confidentiality implies that all personal information about the participants will be handled strictly confidential (Maree, 2020:48, Strydom & Roestenburg, 2021:124). Thus, the researcher kept all identifiable information confidential, including the contents of the data collection interviews. She obtained permission through the letters of informed consent and assent to audio record the data collection interviews. The participants and their parents were also informed that the interviews would be transcribed and that only the researcher and her supervisor would have access to these. Also, they were informed that all raw data, including the transcribed text and consent and assent forms, would be securely stored for 15 years at the Department of Social work and Criminology as required by the University of Pretoria.

3.3.5 No deception

Researchers must be transparent about the research study and provide potential research participants information about the true nature of the study (Bless et al., 2013:34; Strydom & Roestenburg, 2021:123). Deception can occur in different ways, for example by providing incorrect and misleading information or by withholding information from potential participants, which can lead to false expectations by the participants (Strydom & Roestenburg, 2021:123). During the recruitment of participants, the parents or caregivers as well as the potential child participants were provided with correct and comprehensive information on the purpose and nature of the study. This information was stated in the letters of informed consent and assent and was also verbally discussed to ensure that it was clear to the parents or caregivers as well as the children. Strydom and Roestenburg (2021:123) warn that deception is not always

deliberate but can also be unintentional and that researchers should attend to unintentional deception as soon as they become aware of it. In this study, the researcher did not become aware of any unintentional deception that occurred.

3.3.6 Debriefing of participants

Debriefing is intended to provide the research participants with an opportunity to work through their experience of participation in the research. This process is important as participation in the data collection interviews might trigger emotions and lead to renewed awareness of aspects about themselves. During debriefing, the participants can discuss these aspects, have any questions answered, while the researcher can monitor whether the participants experience any discomfort (Babbie, 2017:71; Strydom & Roestenburg, 2021:125). Apart from addressing possible misconceptions or discomfort, debriefing also offers the researcher to attend to possible deception that occurred (Bless et al., 2013:34). However, debriefing should not be confused with counselling but offers an opportunity to determine whether participants need to be referred for counselling that was arranged for that purpose (Maree, 2020:49; Strydom & Roestenburg, 2021:125). After each data collection interview, the researcher spent time on debriefing to discuss the participants' experiences regarding their participation in the study. Bless et al. (2013:35) mention that debriefing must be sensitively conducted so that participants do not doubt their own performance. The researcher paid attention to this aspect as the participants were children in middle childhood and in a life stage where children are sensitive to their ability for mastering tasks (Louw & Louw, 2014b:257).

3.3.7 Actions and competence of the researcher

Researchers must ensure that they have the knowledge and skills to competently conduct a study (Strydom & Roestenburg, 2021:126). Furthermore, Mogorosi (2018:83), referring to statements by Peled and Leichtentritt (2002) and Bleenberger and Fränkel (2006), urges social workers to not only aim to be good researchers, but to also be good "ethicists" that possess the following characteristics: "integrity and critical self-insight, responsibility and moral courage, a sense of justice and balanced judgement, broad-mindedness and sensitivity [and] a basic attitude of respect and equality in relation to others." The researcher therefore aimed to implement the study based on a sound knowledge of research methodology and respect for the ethical principles of research. Research knowledge and skills obtained in the advanced research module that formed part of the masters' degree enabled the researcher to conduct the study and uphold the ethical research principles throughout her interactions with the research participants and their parents or caregivers. As a registered social worker, she also upheld the social work values of the South African Council for Social Service Professions (1979), amongst others, respect for human rights and dignity and worth of all human beings.

The study was also conducted after a thorough literature study to familiarise herself with the topic of child well-being as well as with regular engagement with the research supervisor, as advised by Strydom and Roestenburg (2021:127).

3.3.8 Publication of findings

The research report, containing the empirical findings of the study, is available to the public through the library of the University of Pretoria. Publication of findings is the ultimate purpose of research as it adds new knowledge to existing knowledge. The researcher ensured that the findings are truthfully presented by including quotes from the data collection interviews, the integration of existing literature, and avoidance of plagiarism (Babbie, 2017:72; Bless et al., 2013:36; Strydom & Roestenburg, 2021:128).

3.4 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

This section will provide information on the biographical profile and household structure of the participants (Section A), followed by the empirical findings of the study (Section B).

3.4.1 Section A: Biographical profile of the participants

The study sample consisted of ten children between the ages of 8 and 12. The biographical details of the participants are presented in Table 4.1 below.

Table 1: Biographical details of the participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Number of family members	Family members	Employed person in the home
1	11	Female	4	Father, mother, brother, participant	Mother and father
2	11	Female	4	Father, mother, brother and participant	Father
3	12	Male	5	Mother, aunt, brother, sister and participant	Child does not know
4	11	Female	5	Father, mother, 2 brothers and participant	Mother and father
5	12	Male	6	Father, mother, grandfather, grandmother, brother and participant	Father, mother and grandfather
6	10	Male	6	Aunt, uncle, cousin, twin sisters and participant	Aunt
7	9	Female	3	Mother, grandmother and participant	Mother
8	11	Male	4	Aunt, uncle, cousin and participant	Aunt
9	9	Female	3	Father, mother, brother and participant	Father
10	10	Male	4	Father, mother and participant	Father and mother

The participants were in the developmental phase of middle childhood. Most of the participants (four) were 11 years old, two were 12 years old, two were 10 years old, and two participants were 9 years old. There were five male and five female participants in the study. Six participants lived within a nuclear family that consisted of a father, mother and one or more siblings. Two participants resided with extended family members, namely an uncle and aunt while their biological parents were residing in other places due to employment commitments, and two participants were part of a single-parent household that was headed by the mother.

According to Hall and Mokomane (2018:32-33) a family is a group of individuals who are related by blood, marriage, kinship or some affiliation that endure over time and space and share resources to maintain their household and who reside in the same house. A nuclear family is a family that consists of biological parents and their children (Hall & Mokomane, 2018:34). Migrant labour and delayed marriage due to various reasons are some of the reasons children end up residing with extended family members and not live with their biological parents (Richter et al., 2012:2). The extended family is characterised by family members who are biologically related to the child such as the child's grandparents, siblings,

and other family members of the child, whereas a single parent headed family is a family that is characterised by a single parent residing with his or her children (Hall & Mokomane, 2018:34).

Be that as it may, Hall and Richter (2018:23) caution that it should be taken into account that defining a family is complex as it is a system consisting of multigenerational relationships made up of relatives such as parents, grandparents, cousins, aunts, uncles, and children who are related by blood, marriage, co-residence, sharing a house and sometimes residing in different households. Households are manifestations of the material and social strategies utilised by families at various stages for various goals. These include obtaining housing and security and education, obtaining financial support, and caring for the elderly and for children. Family networks surpass the actual borders of any given household and what matters about them is the quality of care and stability of relationships that exist amongst family members (Hall & Richter, 2018:24-25).

Data collection interviews were conducted with the above participants. The research findings will be discussed in the next section.

3.4.2 Section B: Qualitative research findings

Table 2 below provides an outline of the themes and sub-themes that became evident during data analysis.

Table 2: Themes and subthemes in the data

THEMES	SUB-THEMES
Theme 1: Signs that it is going well with a child	1.1 The child is happy 1.2 The child is cared for 1.3 The child feels loved
Theme 2: People who are important for children's well-being	2.1 Children need parents to live well 2.2 Siblings can support a child 2.3 Friends are important to a child 2.4 Members of the extended family can enhance children's well-being 2.5 Teachers play a role in children's well-being 2.6 Pets can make children feel good
Theme 3: Resources in the caregiving environment that support children's well-being	3.1 Children must have shelter 3.2 Children must have food 3.3 Children need proper clothes and school uniforms 3.4 Children should have access to clean water and sanitation 3.5 There should be electricity 3.6 Children must have access to electronic devices
Theme 4: Community resources that support children's well-being	4.1 Children need schools 4.2 There should be churches in the community 4.3 Children must have access to clinics and hospitals 4.4 There should be playgrounds, parks and sports facilities 4.5 Fire stations are important resources
Theme 5: Environments that support children's well-being	5.1 The environment must be healthy and without pollution 5.2 Children must live in safe environments
Theme 6: What can children do to enhance child well-being?	6.1 Children can help to keep their environment clean 6.2 Children can engage positively with others
Theme 7: What can adults do to enhance children's well-being?	7.1 All adults should protect and guide children 7.2 Adults can motivate children to do their best

3.4.2.1 Theme 1: Signs that it is going well with a child

The participants focused on three aspects that they regarded as indications of children's well-being. They related well-being to children being happy, being cared for and feeling loved. These aspects will be discussed as the sub-themes in this theme.

- **Sub-theme 1.1: The child is happy**

Most of the participants related children's well-being to feelings of happiness.

"They are always like smiling ... they are enjoying their time. ... they are happy ... they are never down. Never feel like they are alone." (Participant 1)

"When they are smiling and when they're playing." (Participant 9)

"Enjoying themselves. Not crying ... being happy. Saying 'my mom bought me that!' Like they sound happy... Something like when your mother buys you a toy that's expensive or you go somewhere you've never went, and you excited with that." (Participant 7)

The participants generally perceived well-being as a child being happy and indicated conditions that would contribute to a child's happiness, for example that they are not alone, they can play, or they receive a gift.

However, some participants described aspects such as poverty and lack of attention from parents that would negatively affect a child's sense of happiness, as in the excerpts below:

"Denied, not getting the attention that they want from their parents." (Participant 3)

"So, let's say they don't like that they're poor and after they go and bully other children that they see are not poor ... Their parents don't have money." (Participant 10)

Happiness is one of the indicators of subjective well-being (Statham & Chase, 2010:2; Ruggeri et al., 2020:1). The participants' association of children's well-being with happiness is also described by Casas and Frönes (2019:4). Savahl et al. (2017:2) describe that well-being is influenced by positive and negative life experiences, which were also evident in the participants' views. Positive experiences are related to positive emotions, which form part of their total well-being (Minkinen, 2013:550-551). Branscombe and Baron (2017:32) state that negative experiences will then negatively affect children's well-being. As described by the participants, it is evident that they related signs of well-being to what occurs in a child's social environment. Chaundry and Wimer (2016:26) highlight that poverty has a negative influence on child well-being as it reduces resources for meeting children's daily needs, resulting in poor outcomes in the child's health, education and behaviour. Likewise, Bezuidenhout (2013:75) highlights that children are at risk of developing behavioural problems when parents and caregivers are unable to meet their needs.

Sub-theme 1.2: The child is cared for

The participants emphasised the importance of children being cared for and supported by their parents and family. They suggested different ways in which care could be expressed, for example looking out for children's well-being, talking to them, providing in their needs for food and safety, helping them with homework and supporting their education.

"By checking on the child every time and making sure that their needs are met ... By making sure that your child is happy. Uhm asking them about, uhm how they are doing, so that they don't feel alone and lonely." (Participant 4)

"Eh, the family respects him. They listen to him, they love him, and they care for him." (Participant 5)

"By loving her, taking care of her and taking responsibility for her ... make sure that before she sleeps, she must eat ... The reason for that is ... [if] you are home alone, like nobody is going to care about you and a thief can come into the house and kill you without the parents knowing." (Participant 6)

"She [mother] looks after them, she takes care of them, she loves them, she supports them. She does everything for them ... Teaching them homework ... they must not leave their children on some empty stomach and then go to sleep." (Participant 8)

"I think that's why we say cared for ... and supported ... By sending them to school to be educated." (Participant 2)

As described by the participants, care does not only involve looking after children's physical needs, but also includes emotional and educational support. Patel (2015:301) confirms that "care" encompasses both mental and physical support. Feeding, cleaning, and tending to someone are examples of physical care. Minkinnen (2013:551) stresses the importance of the material care that the child receives in the home for children's well-being. In addition, caregiving that is characterised by positive parent-child interactions, support and relationships will contribute to children's well-being (Buck et al., 2018:1255; Kim et al., 2019:13). Parents can demonstrate care by showing interest in what their children do and rewarding them when they perform well in their schoolwork (Louw & Louw, 2014:241). Socio-economic factors such as unemployment and poverty can, however, affect parents' ability to care for their children (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:814; Nwosu, 2021:13).

- **Sub-theme 1.3: The child feels loved**

The research findings indicate that children need to feel loved by their parents, family and friends. Participant 3 explained how parents would show a child that they loved him or her.

"So, you must be loved by your parents." (Participant 2)

"Like when they have caring friends and family ... Children's needs are a loving family." (Participant 4)

"[Being loved] is when their parents play with [them]. That's how my brother loves my dad 'cos my dad he would always play with my brother and my sister. ... So, that's how I would think kids are happy in their homes. It's the time you spend with them." (Participant 3)

As explained by the participants, children need to grow up in a loving family environment for them to experience a sense of well-being. In its Preamble, the Convention on the Rights of the Child state the importance of growing up "in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding" (United Nations, 1989:1). Experiencing a sense of belonging in the family through trust, happiness, mutual responsiveness, cooperation, shared power, play and negotiation, is a significant factor in children's well-being (Fattore & Mason, 2017:280, 282).

The findings presented in Theme 1 show that children's subjective well-being is influenced by their experiences in their environment and is dependent on their interpretation of these experiences (Savahl et al., 2017:2; Nadan & Tzadok, 2019:462). Studies on children's well-being explain the importance of an ecological approach to child well-being (cf. Ayala-Nunes et al, 2018). Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Louw et al., 2014:29) was also the theoretical framework for this study and provides insight into the role of their circumstances in children's perception of their well-being.

3.4.2.2 Theme 2: People who are important for children's well-being

The participants identified different people who would play a role in children's well-being. These people included members of their nuclear family and extended family as well as their teachers. Some participants expressed the importance of children having pets in their lives.

- **Sub-theme 2.1: Children need parents to live well**

The participants highlighted that parents are important for the well-being of children. They are the primary caregivers responsible for providing in the child's needs such as food, paying school fees, disciplining them and playing with them.

"Parents ... so that they can guide them in life. ... let me just take myself as an example, is that my father only ... he is the only one that puts food on the table, right... So that's how my father always look, looks at us and pay for our school fees too so that we can be educated. And my mother, she always cooks for us ... tidy for us. And always teaches us, us how life is." (Participant 2)

"Parents ... They should respect their child ... teach their child lessons about life. And I think if a child does something [wrong] it is okay for them to punish them. But they must also, uhm, be kind to them." (Participant 4)

"To have parents ... playing with them, protecting them and watching out for them." (Participant 6)

“Teach them [children] the ways of God ... Err, not smoking, not drinking alcohol, no smoking drugs, beating other people for no reason.” (Participant 5)

The above findings show that the participants valued parents as the primary caregivers of children. The participants mentioned the role of parents in providing children with food, protection, and opportunities to attend school, and highlighted the role of parents in guiding children and teaching them lessons about life. Minkinnen (2015:551) emphasises that children’s social competence is important for forming relationships with others. The family is recognised as essential for meeting children’s basic needs as well as nurturing and supporting their physical, socio-emotional, spiritual, and moral development (Department of Social Development, 2021:2). The findings are in line with that of others who state that children’s well-being benefit from positive relations, support and interactions with parents (Kim et al., 2019:13). In the same way, poor parent-child interactions and poor parenting practices negatively affect children’s well-being (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:814; Newland et al., 2019:398; Nahkur & Kutsar, 2019:358). Furthermore, the findings of this study confirm that of a study among children aged between 10 and 15 that found that having good relationships with parents, characterised by support and spending time together, contributed significantly to the child’s subjective well-being (Navarro, Montserrat, Malo, Gonzalez, Casas & Crous, 2015:5). The ecological systems theory shows that parents as members of the child’s most important microsystem have a direct impact on children’s well-being through their mutual interactions (Nahkur & Kutsar, 2019:35).

- **Sub-theme 2.2: Siblings can support a child**

The participants saw siblings as an important source of support for children. They identified mainly two types of support that could enhance a child’s well-being. Some participants mentioned that siblings can support a child emotionally, while others mentioned siblings’ role in taking care of their physical safety.

“Little sisters and little brothers ... when they cry, we take care of them. ... we help them and we put them to sleep.” (Participant 8)

“Going through depression ... Like most boys, like going for a game that they’ve played for hours, and they failed. Feels like you were a fool or something or you were playing a soccer match, and you’ve lost and you’re angry. You must just be there for your sibling. [and] I feel like the child should be walking with a parent or somebody that you know can protect you. That’s where the brother thing kicks in, like if you are close, you guys can walk together.” (Participant 3)

“Your sister or your brother takes care of you like if somebody bullies you. They take care of you. They stand up for you.” (Participant 7)

“And when your big brother comes, he can help you and get you out of a fight.” (Participant 6)

According to the ecological systems theory, the reciprocal interactions between persons in the child's microsystem have a direct influence on the child (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013:4). Positive relationships between siblings hold benefits for children such as receiving support and having a sense of being protected (Parritz & Troy, 2018:42). A child's well-being is enhanced by positive and supportive interpersonal relationships (Henderson & Thompson, 2016:43). As noted by Participant 3, having a supportive sibling can buffer children against depression and prevent its related effects such as social disengagement, sadness, and reduced physical activity (Parritz & Troy, 2018:230). On the other hand, there are siblings that do not have a positive relationship and whose relationships are characterised by kicking, biting, punching and verbal insults. Causes of negative relationships between siblings are believed to be, amongst others, a child's poor self-esteem, victimisation by parents and alcohol abuse by parents (Bezuidenhout, 2013:45). The influence of parents on sibling relationships can be ascribed to the reciprocal interactions in the microsystem of the home, where problems experienced by one family member can influence the interactions between other members (Berk, 2013:27).

- **Sub-theme 2.3: Friends are important to a child**

It was noted that, whereas some participants mentioned how friends could support a child in practical ways, most of the participants highlighted the emotional support that friends could provide. Emotional support was related to trusting a friend and confiding in friends, even about issues children might not feel comfortable to discuss with their parents.

"Friends should be there for you in tough times ... If no one's around, they should be people that you know that they will forever be with you." (Participant 1)

"Maybe, really close friends that you care about them, and [they] love you... They don't bully you or gossip about you in any way." (Participant 4)

"So that's why they call it a best friend because you trust that person. You trust them with your family secrets. Even if your mom says that if you don't find that scaftin [lunch box], don't come here to her house ... And then the friend goes, 'okay, let's go'. And they look, you look, you find it." (Participant 7)

"I would like to add friends because friends, you can talk to friends about things happening in your house or things that are difficult for you. So, we can help each other." (Participant 2)

"Maybe you are sick at school, and you cannot carry the bag. Some friends can carry the bag for you." (Participant 5)

As indicated in the research findings, friendship is an important aspect that determines children's subjective well-being (Nadan & Kaye-Tzadok, 2019:463). The participants' views that friends provide practical and emotional support is also described in literature. Children's subjective well-being is supported by the sense of belonging and trust shared in a friendship

group (Fattore & Mason, 2017:280). A study by Navarro et al. (2015:6) found that friendships contribute to the subjective well-being of children as they are sources of affection, joy, support and play. Friendships offer a source of support during difficult times and reduce loneliness (Office for National Statistics, 2020:7). Interaction with friends in different contexts enhances child well-being and facilitates human development.

- **Sub-theme 2.4: Members of the extended family can enhance children's well-being**

The participants identified grandparents as well as aunts and uncles as people who could support children in times when their parents are away from home. They pointed out that grandparents or members of the extended family are not only there as caregivers but also to guide children.

"Someone from their family or their grandmothers... To support them ... when their mother is not there, and they have to go to [an] event." (Participant 10)

"Maybe when eh, eh, father and mother go to work, then the grandmother and grandpa do not go to work. Then the grandmother and grandfather can take care of the kid when they go to work." (Participant 5)

"Grandmother always take care of us [when our parents are away]. ... They [grandparents] are like a father and mothers to us ... Maybe if there's an aunt looking after children, they must also guide them. Or even though you are the mother but you're not the real child's mother, you must also guide them." (Participant 2)

"When my mom and my dad are gone, we would go to my aunt and uncle. They would be like my second mom or my second dad with my siblings. That's how I see it. ... this one fun uncle, fun auntie ... I can't explain it, like always has the time, has never been angry with the child. There will be times yes but, like when you see them, they're like always having fun with each other. [And] maybe the grandparents. ... I just knew my grandma. She's fun to me, she's always been there for me and my siblings." (Participant 3)

The research findings support the assertion by Cross (2018:2, 6) that extended family members provide protection to children and meet children's needs when the parents are absent. Similarly, Hall and Richter (2018:24) indicate that grandparents and other unemployed members of the family can be caretakers for the child during the absence of working parents. These findings reflect the South African family system which is increasingly characterised by other family members taking care of children (Makiwane, Gumede, Makoe & Vawda, 2017:59). According to the mentioned authors, grandparents care for their grandchildren in cases where the parents migrate to find employment, passed away or when children have been born outside marriage or cohabitation. Children being cared for by grandparents tend to experience poorer well-being because of the poorer socio-economic circumstances that characterise many grandparent-headed households. Naicker, Berry, Drysdale, Makusha and Richter (2021/2022:72, 78) state that families have a significant effect on children's well-being

regardless of the family form, therefore families must be supported to fulfil their role. The Child Support Grant (CSG) was found to have positive effects on parents' mental health as well as on children's health, nutritional and educational outcomes (Naicker et al., 2021/2022:79).

- **Sub-theme 2.5: Teachers play a role in children's well-being**

The participants suggested different ways in which teachers can play a role in children's well-being. Teachers were seen as helping children with their schoolwork, but also supporting their emotional and social well-being.

"Teachers to help you with your education that you can uhm get into good schools and get a good job." (Participant 4)

"Teachers ... the teacher educates the children ... They teach you ... how you must start your life or be successful in life." (Participant 2)

"The teacher can teach you Science and to know Science, you can know something or create something. And they can also teach you English and they can also know how you are feeling. They can also tell you to listen and also tell you what to do at school. Because if you are at school, they, uhm, there needs to be a teacher 'cos somebody is going to care for you." (Participant 6)

"Help you when you get bullied. Teach you about a lot of things and letting you to have fun." (Participant 9)

The research findings reveal how the role of teachers in children's well-being can never be underestimated. The participants mention several benefits of positive teacher involvement in addition to receiving academic instruction. Teachers can also serve as protectors and guide children toward pathways that are necessary for their future success. Van der Kaap-Deeder et al. (2016:239) confirm that teachers do not only enhance children's mental well-being by assisting in developing critical cognitive skills, but they also offer emotional support especially to those children who have difficulties with their schoolwork. Kim et al. (2019:13-14) note that caring teachers are predictive of students' well-being. Important to note is that teachers who are caring are those who are aware that children's academic work is affected by their home environments and aim to provide a healthy classroom environment to support children's academic and socio-emotional well-being (Jennings, 2015:733). The findings are supported by the Office of National Statistics (2021:16), stating that teachers who are kind, supportive and fun and contribute satisfaction in school are important for the learners' subjective well-being. As indicated by the participants, children's educational well-being can contribute to a sustainable future for children and society.

On the other hand, the following participant expressed that learners' relationships with the teacher sometimes involve conflict.

"Other teachers would get angry at us and some kids would get in trouble, like someone got suspended in our class for something that he did not do. And when

they found out that it was not that person, they did not do anything because he already did the punishment, so what! So, I feel like for me, they should be in our lives, but they should not have a big, big connection with them.” (Participant 3).

Jennings (2014:733) highlights that the circumstances cited above do exist. These circumstances can emanate from teachers who experience burn-out because of emotional stress. Teachers experiencing emotional stress can result in poor teacher-child interactions in the classroom.

- **Sub-theme 2.6: Pets can make children feel good**

Most of the participants described the benefits of having pets because of the emotional support that a pet can provide. The value of pets in preparing children for taking on responsibilities and for protecting children were also mentioned.

“They [pets] help kids when they’re sad ... getting bullied.” (Participant 9)

“They [dogs] protect the child, and when you fall down, they take care of you ... And when you are falling down, he grabs you. And when you are going somewhere he comes and rescues you.” (Participant 8)

“You can love pets. But pets can love you.” (Participant 6)

The findings support research about the benefits of children’s interactions with pets. Similar to or even better than their interactions with humans, interactions with pets can lower feelings of loneliness and isolation and enhance children’s physical and emotional health (Bennetts et al., 2022:17; Purewal et al., 2017:2). It is known that many children confide in their pets, sometimes preferring to talk to pets over talking to parents or other people, which can be ascribed to pets being seen as non-judgemental, accepting, and providing unconditional love (Bennetts et al., 2022:17; Brooks, Rushton, Lovell, Bee, Walker, Grant & Rogers, 2018:5; Purewal et al., 2017:2). The Office for National Statistics (2021:8) found that relationships with pets were beneficial for children in that pets offered affection and made children feel like they had a responsibility.

Participant 3 mentioned that the loss of a pet could however be distressing for children:

“So, for me, I love, I do love dogs but for me I’ve had like five dogs and like once, one per three months. They each keep getting killed or they get lost, or they run away from home. So that made me sad, so I was like I don’t have a dog right now. I don’t own a pet, but I feel like a pet would be good for a child if they like, they can handle it. I took their death and them running away very hard. So, I was like, I’m done with dogs. So, I don’t have dog since I was nine.” (Participant 3)

As mentioned by the participant, there are psychological costs associated with a pet's death, and these costs may result in psychological distress, including worry and sadness (Bennetts et al., 2022:17).

3.4.2.3 Theme 3: Resources in the caregiving environment that support children's well-being

In response to a question on what resources would enhance children's well-being, the participants suggested several resources that would meet children's needs, namely shelter, food, clothing, water, sanitation and electricity as well as access to electronic devices. The participants also highlighted how economic factors are interconnected with children's well-being.

- **Sub-theme 3.1: Children must have shelter**

The findings reveal the participants' views that children need protection in a form of shelter as undesirable weather conditions cause harm to children. A lack of shelter exposes children to other risks such as illnesses and unsafe physical conditions. Furthermore, shelter provides a sense of freedom as one is free to move around as desired when in their own safe space.

"Shelter... Protection from any harm like rain and storms. If they don't have shelter, they could get hurt and things like that ... And they have a place to call home... It makes them feel comfortable." (Participant 1)

"Other children don't have a home; they live on the streets. We have, some of us are lucky out there, we have a home. A house is important so that you can live in it. Some, if you look at poor children, they sleep on the streets. When it rains, the rain falls on them ... and they get some colds and flu. They don't even have money to go to the clinic or hospital. That is why it is important to have a house." (Participant 2)

"Maybe when it is raining the child doesn't get a cold quickly because the house protects the children that they must not be sick. ... It helps maybe when they [people] are fighting outside, you can run into the house. Or when it is storming you can quickly run into the house or when there is robbery at another house you can run to house and get back to the house." (Participant 5)

"Somewhere they need to live and a place where they can feel comfortable and free ... At school you have to know your line [follow the rules]. At home you could be whoever you want and be free." (Participant 3)

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Section 28 (Republic of South Africa, 1996), state that children have a right to shelter. The importance of proper shelter is also emphasised in the country's National Development Plan to ensure children's optimal development and their protection (Martin et al., 2016:114). Having access to shelter and other material belongings that are usually a part of the standard of living in the community and culture one lives in is a necessary condition for material well-being (Minkkinen, 2013:551; Smith et al., 2013:84). Although housing standards are usually objectively measured (King et al., 2014:682-283; Statham & Chase, 2010:2), children's evaluation thereof may influence their subjective well-being. Having proper shelter is important for children's safety and is perceived to enhance their resilience (Savahl et al., 2013:580; Van Breda & Theron, 2018:242).

- **Sub-theme 3.2: Children must have food**

The participants stated that children need food to support their well-being. They associated the availability of healthy food with its nutritional and physical benefits and also pointed out the need for meals for children's ability to concentrate at school.

"So, when you said what we need to live well. We need food like, to build like our immune system like our body for our health." (Participant 3)

"They must have food to eat every day ... 'cos if you don't eat every day ... like you're going to faint without eating every day. And without eating you're going to die." (Participant 6)

"It is important to eat before class, because if you don't eat before class, you don't concentrate in class." (Participant 2)

"When they eat healthy, they grow strong." (Participant 5)

Children's well-being depends on having their basic needs met, such as having sufficient food. As the participants mentioned, eating healthy foods boosts children's health and enables children to focus on their work while at school. To this effect, Buck et al. (2018:1260) confirm that food insecurity can affect children's academic performance. The socio-economic situation of the family will determine whether children have access to enough food, which relates to their material well-being (Minkinnen, 2013:551). Large numbers of children in South Africa are exposed to poverty (Lake et al., 2019:32; SAHRC & UNICEF, 2016:5). It is thus important to assist vulnerable families in securing food (Martin et al., 2016:114). In assisting children who do not have sufficient food, Patel et al. (2015:379) refer to the Child Support Grant (CSG) that has been initiated to reduce hunger. School feeding schemes were also developed to improve child health (Mathee, Barnes, Naidoo, Swart & Rother & Andrea, 2018:287).

- **Sub-theme 3.3: Children need proper clothes and school uniforms**

The participants believed that having proper clothes will be beneficial for children's well-being. Clothes would protect children's dignity as well as protect them against harsh weather conditions.

"We obviously wear clothes. Clothes also help our bodies. 'Cos now it is wintertime we need to buy some jerseys. In summer we must wear some short clothes. It is important for your body 'cos no one can see your body ... We know that boys are not allowed to see girls' bodies. That's why clothes are important to us as kids." (Participant 2)

"It's just like a form of privacy ... you get to cover yourself and not show yourself off. ... [And] it's like it's keeping us warm on those cold days." (Participant 3)

"Like when it is raining, you have some clothes that can make you warm so you cannot get sick." (Participant 5)

“You can also give some people clothes like poor people can also be given, uhm, clothes. So that’s why you need clothes, to give other people who are poor.”
(Participant 6)

As with food and shelter, the Revised White Paper on Families in South Africa (Department of Social Development, 2021:2) regard clothing as one of the resources that the family should provide for the optimal development of their members. Of interest is that the participants referred to the functions of clothing, but not to the social aspects related to clothing. The Allen + Clarke Evidence Brief (2022:4) notes the social effects of clothing, stating that children who do not have appropriate clothing due to poverty “feel ashamed about their appearance and family or household situation.” This influence was more evident in the participants’ views on the need for a school uniform. Participants 5 and 9 felt that it was important for children to have school uniforms. This view was, however, not shared by Participant 3.

“A school uniform helps us. When there is not school uniforms and shoes, maybe you wore something that is good, and after that ... you are not happy because some other people they tell you that, ‘Is this the only clothes that you have?’ That’s why there are school uniforms.” (Participant 5)

“It has colours for the [uniforms]. If everybody had the same school uniform in different schools, they were not going to know which school they went to. ... the colour of the school helps them see the right school ... when you have a school uniform there’s a badge of the school.” (Participant 9)

“I don’t think that kids need school uniforms, and we asked our principal, and he said [it is so that] we all look the same and not different. I feel like kids should be allowed to just go to school casual but not something like girls wearing something until here [demonstrating a short skirt or dress] and a boy that is wearing a shirt that’s like showing here [pointing to the chest]. That is showing their body. [But] not like something that is like controlled, not like over the top.” (Participant 3)

The advantages of having school uniforms, as suggested by the participants, are described by various authors. Wearing a school uniform is required in South African schools (Department of Education, 2006). According to Reidy (2021:4), school uniforms can aid in class discipline, reduce distractions, and instil moral and social values in children that will prepare them for the world after school. Lacking a school uniform can lead to a child being excluded from school-related events (Main, 2014:468). However, Reidy (2021:4) states that school uniforms can also expose children to bullying in which children of a specific school are targeted. Hall (2021/2022b:185) attributes children inability to wear school uniform to financial difficulties experienced by families.

- **Sub-theme 3.4: Children should have access to clean water and sanitation**

The participants regarded water as a basic resource, but that it should be clean as those who do not have clean water are exposed to health risks. Water is also necessary for washing clothes, sanitation and growing a garden.

“Water, I think that [is what] everyone needs. Uhm, its healthy. It uhm cleans you. ... Like there are some kids who don’t have the privilege to get water from the shops and other places. And when it’s dirty, the next thing they get sick.”
(Participant 1)

“Water is very important to them. You can bath with water. You can drink it. If you don’t drink water maybe for a few days and you don’t even have food, you will practically die. ... And then it is very important to clean our water because now there’s been cases about cholera and stuff like that and that water, they must clean it first.” (Participant 2)

“It helps to keep clean, and we also need water to survive and keep hydrated.”
(Participant 4)

“It helps them about the toilets, drinking water, bathing, washing clothes and spraying, spraying the, the gardens.” (Participant 6)

As indicated by the participants, having access to clean water is one of the factors that support children’s physical well-being (Minkinnen, 2013:550). A lack of services such as access to clean water is often related to poverty (Davids & Gouws, 2013:1203). In households that lack basic services such as the provision of water, women must fetch water from communal resources, resulting in minimising valuable family time (Patel, 2015:301). It must be recognised that when provision in their basic needs is limited, sustaining a positive future for children will be a challenge (Savahl et al, 2017:39).

Some participants expressed the need for sanitation and explained how it would assist a child.

“A place where you can excrete ... Not like you do it in the streets where everyone can see you. It’s like a private place for you.” (Participant 3)

“Eh when you want to do number two, you can go to the toilets.” (Participant 5)

Odeku (2022:98) explains that the dignity of children in the rural areas have been violated as they are forced to relieve themselves in unsanitary toilets. Going to pit toilets is risky as there are possibilities of losing a life, as reported in some rural areas in South Africa. Khumalo and Mji (2014:1526) mention an example of a school that had two pit toilets that had to be shared by over 500 learners. The school also did not have clean water. Teachers had to walk distances to neighbouring homes to relieve themselves, leaving the school children unattended.

The lack of access to basic resources such as water and sanitation is considered as a violation of the 2030 Agenda (United Nations, 2015:20). South Africa’s National Development Plan (NDP) views access to water and sanitation as an important for securing children’s development (Martin et al., 2016:114). Hall and Nannan (2021/2022:180) note the health effects of not having access to these resources and state that poor children in South Africa “bear the greatest burden of disease” due to a lack of access to water and sanitation services.

- **Sub-theme 3.5: There should be electricity**

The necessity of children having electricity was mentioned by the participants, stating that it provides light and enables them to eat cooked meals, to charge cell phones and to watch television that they enjoy and can learn from.

“Electricity helps to see where they are going ... To watch like important stories [on television] ... Like they’re telling you something correct. When you are doing something wrong, they’re telling you something better.” (Participant 8)

“It can give you light. It can help you get food, like when there is no electricity, and you switch on the stove but there is no electricity. So that’s why you always need electricity. You need electricity to charge your phone to call your parents and you need it to have light so that you see where you’re going.” (Participant 2)

“Electricity is also part of food ... electricity you need to wash your clothes with the machine ... It’s also for watching TV. Children love watching TV.” (Participant 7)

As indicated by the participants, electricity impacts on people’s lives in different ways. Electricity is seen as one of the universally accessible resources important for children’s development that must be provided by government departments (Dube & Moyo, 2022:6; Proudlock & Rohrs, 2018:13-14). Dube and Moyo (2022:2) state that electricity directly impacts on people’s communication, education, security and transport. Unfortunately, poor families often lack electricity in the home, which makes some revert to practices such as illegal connections that put their safety at risk (Kimemia et al., 2018:969-970).

- **Sub-theme 3.6: Children must have access to electronic devices**

Some participants believed children should have access to electronic devices such as television, cell phones and laptops. Television was seen as having both educational and recreational advantages.

“Television is very important, but not more important than other resources. I’m not saying it is the most important thing in the world. Television can tell you. Like the other pandemic we had ... in 2019 COVID-19, right? ... Like Covid-19, we [also] heard it from television now there’s cholera in Hammanskraal, places like that we hear our water is not clean.” (Participant 2)

“It can help them about education and schoolwork, ‘cos there is also television that helps you with schoolwork. You can also see cartoons.” (Participant 6)

The educational and recreational advantages of cell phones and laptops were mentioned by the participants, while they also saw the value of these devices for communication.

“We can use cell phones and laptops for working or when their parents are not there, and we need to call them or WhatsApp them. Then they can also play games on the laptop ... or call your parents when you’re, like you want to speak to them cos you miss them ... [when] they haven’t been with them.” (Participant 6)

"Laptops help us to register for spaces in universities so that we can be educated ... Cell phones help us a lot because you can communicate ... say, my mother works at Cape Town ... and I'm here at Brits ... I can communicate with my mother. She can send me some money ... stuff I need for school and education."
(Participant 2)

"The laptops help you with history, learning about Jesus, and phone calling at school ... Yah, and play games on it ... some games teach them." (Participant 9)

"Play games, text my friends on WhatsApp, call them on video call. If they don't have WhatsApp, we talk on Facebook ... use their phones on the weekends."
(Participant 7)

Patel (2015:306) highlights that technology such as telecommunication, the Internet, cell phones and computers promote development due to an increased access to information. Due to its availability in the children's direct environment, such as the home or friendship group, the Internet is regarded as a techno-subsystem in children's microsystem (Johnson & Pupilampu, 2008:5), which explains the strong impact that the use of these technologies can have on children's functioning and well-being. Participant 3 suggested that, while children's well-being will be enhanced if they have access to the Internet, one must be aware of the potential risks of Internet use.

"I feel like children should have Internet. Like not the bad side, but like a good side ... They should use it for their own benefit. And they can use it for... entertainment and stuff when they've got nothing to do when they're bored. ... I want to encourage it but not encourage it 'cos there might be some scams, and you do lose money and stuff like that. It's just like for like experience for when you're older... So, I think that there are hackers out there saying, like hackers out there that might endanger you and your money and, overall, everything that you have online." (Participant 3)

This view is endorsed by Buck et al. (2018:1256), who warn that Internet use can stimulate children's development, however, also has harmful consequences that come with it. They highlight exposure to cyberbullying and the harmful effects of children engaging on social media or watching television while doing their schoolwork.

3.4.2.4 Theme 4: Community resources that support children's well-being

The participants identified different community resources that can support the well-being of children. These resources include schools, churches, clinics and hospitals, playgrounds, parks and sports facilities as well as fire stations.

- **Sub-theme 4.1: Children need schools**

The participants believed that schools were important for children's education and their future employment prospects. Some participants also highlighted that attending school provides opportunities for forming friendships.

"School because we need an education." (Participant 4)

"Err, school help the children to get knowledge, then in the future they can get a job." (Participant 5)

"I know some other kids don't like school. But school is very important so you can be successful in life. So, you must be educated and be who you want to be ... And every child must get free education." (Participant 2)

"I'll start at school ... Art class, maths class, painting, playing on the playgrounds ... And getting new friends." (Participant 9)

"It's a place of learning and where you get knowledge, and where you make friends and where you get to know people easier... 'Cos I can't make friends like on the streets. I'm just a shy person when it comes to making friends." (Participant 3)

As mentioned by the participants, education is seen as a path that can provide South African children with opportunities to enhance their economic prospects and to participate in social and political activities. Well-resourced educational institutions are seen as enablers that can promote and ensure the quality of education, which is an important domain of children's well-being (Odeku, 2022:99; Smith et al., 2013:88). Education can influence children's subjective well-being and does not only enhance their cognitive or mental well-being but also influence other well-being domains such as their sense of accomplishment and their physical well-being (Buck et al, 2019:1256, 1259; Goswami, 2014:120; Minkinnen, 2013:550, 552). Children from impoverished homes are at risk of not being able to have access to quality education, which results in a situation where it becomes challenging to escape the poverty line (Twikirize, 2014:56). Section 29 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Republic of South Africa, 1996) advocates that the state should implement strategies to ensure the right of all people to a basic education.

- **Sub-theme 4.2: There should be churches in the community**

Most of the participants believed that there should be churches in communities as the church is a place where children can learn about and practice their religion and also get material help, if needed.

"At the church they teach about not doing bad things, that Jesus is the One who created you. Jesus is the One who created the earth ... and there must be a lot of good people that praise the Lord ... Eh, the people must have knowledge, praising Lord, being good to one another." (Participant 5)

"It's for your religion. Where you're free to practice your religion other than at your home ... Anyone should be free to do their religion anywhere, but the world is not accepting that." (Participant 3)

"For me church is all about God because it's where I learned about God and what he's done for us ... It helps you see God better." (Participant 4)

“When you go to church you can get some help ... They have some donations for you. If you don’t, you are poor and don’t go to school, they can get you some school uniform, pay for your fees, get clothes for you.” (Participant 2)

Some participants emphasised the importance of spirituality for children’s well-being in that it can make children feel loved, protected and cared for:

“God ... protecting them from the devil.” (Participant 8)

“So that they know that God is with them and if things go wrong in their life, they know that God will protect them from that. ... but if there is something that is going to happen God will allow that thing to happen. ... in my honest opinion it makes me feel more loved knowing that God is there for me.” (Participant 4)

“It teaches them to be closer with God. God did a lot for us to be here today.” (Participant 1)

The effects of religion on well-being mentioned by the participants are confirmed by others. The psychological processes and physical health of individuals are often said to be influenced by their religious beliefs (Kosher & Ben-Arieh, 2017:65). In terms of the effects of religion on adolescents’ mental health, Estrada, Lomoy, Gregorio, Amalia, Leynes, Quizon and Kobayashi (2019:3) refer to studies indicating that religion mostly had positive effects on adolescents’ mental health, for example the way they deal with stressful situations, and on their moral beliefs. Crawford (2020:4) states that, although Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory does not refer to the church as part of the microsystem, many people include their faith as part of their microsystem and, if children attend church, the church forms part of their microsystem. The participants’ views show relevance to the church being part of their microsystem.

Participant 3 highlighted the importance of freedom to practice one’s religion. This view is also stated in the Draft Admission Policy for Public Schools, according to which no child should be discriminated against due to their religious belief (Proudlock et al., 2021/2022:16-17). Twikirize (2014:57) emphasises that social workers, when offering social work interventions, must bear in mind that everyone has a right to social work intervention and should not be discriminated against because of their race, gender and religion.

- **Sub-theme 4.3: Children must have access to clinics and hospitals**

The participants expressed the views that having access to medical care services is essential for children’s well-being as these are places that restore the health of children and their families.

“A hospital, so when they get sick or injured, they go to the hospital ... They tell the doctor how they’re feeling ... Then the doctor will get them treatment.” (Participant 10)

“It’s a place where you get your medication. Where you get well and treated. Because if it weren’t for hospital and clinics, we would not have been born ‘cos

people were not taught how to ... to give birth. ... Because some they can be qualified, but the way they do it, it's like they're not qualified to be a doctor or a nurse." (Participant 3)

"Some children are born with HIV and other diseases or sickness. ... So, if you can go to the clinic and get some help." (Participant 2)

Children's health is one of the determinants of their subjective well-being (Buck et al., 2018:1254; Smith et al., 2013:88). Their physical well-being includes their health and physical functioning and the absence of illness (Minkinnen, 2013:550). The participants' views on the importance of children having access to hospitals and clinics are supported by the fact that early medical intervention is important in the prevention of illness and the promotion of children's health (Buck et al., 2018:1261). Minkinnen (2013:550) notes that, as the dimensions of child well-being are interrelated, poor health can affect children's mental health and their cognitive well-being.

People's health status is also one of the objective indicators of well-being (King et al., 2014:682-283; Statham & Chase, 2010:2). Goal 3 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development focuses on "ensuring healthy lives and promote well-being of all at all ages" (United Nations, 2015:16). Although stated as a separate goal, Nunes et al. (2016:3) point out that health is a prerequisite for the achievement of the other SDGs. Not having access to quality healthcare impedes on the basic rights of children to quality health care (Savahl et al., 2015:213).

- **Sub-theme 4.4: There should be playgrounds, parks and sports facilities**

The participants believed that child well-being is enhanced by children playing outside or participating in sports as it enhances their physical and psychological well-being.

"The park is somewhere where you can play. Somewhere where you can take your children to play. Like you can have a soccer game, you can have swings or go to a pool or picnic at the park." (Participant 6)

"Always have things that children need, like swings. 'Cos children love swings." (Participant 7)

"A park is like exercise ... in real life, you can have fun and express yourself. ... Like for me [sport] is something that I like to do that keeps me busy and that keeps me fit. And if I really want to do sports, I can try do like a professional level to make money for me and my family." (Participant 3)

"Sports helps you to be strong and for fitness too... And honestly, it's also for teamwork ... It builds their mood, I think ... and it shows other people around the world and there's different personalities around the world." (Participant 1)

"Sports ... they get stronger ... Sport is also about getting hurt, but it doesn't mean you lost ... It means you're having fun." (Participant 9)

In line with the participants' views, Van Dijk-Wesselius et al. (2018:15) regard parks and other green spaces as essential for children's well-being and their physical functioning. Parks are inviting and encourage children to play, learn and interact with nature. Access to parks and play areas for children is seen as neighbourhood factors that can support children's well-being (Newland et al., 2019:398). Play in outdoor spaces holds benefits for children's physical, social and mental well-being, especially for children growing up in urban areas (Buck et al., 2018:1260; Smith et al., 2013:84). The safety in play spaces in South Africa is, however, of concern due to high levels of crime and violence in communities (Savahl et al., 2015:216). Outdoor activities such as running, jumping or playing soccer are especially enjoyed by children in middle childhood (Henderson & Thompson, 2016:32-33; Louw & Louw, 2014:225-226).

The participants highlighted that participation in sports would not only have physical benefits, but also involves teamwork, having fun and motivating children. Participation in daily activities and sport enable children to develop competencies, form friendships, and contribute to their worlds (Samuels et al., 2020:2). In addition to physical benefits, leisure time activities also enhance mental well-being because it involves spending time with family and friends (Buck et al., 2018:1264).

- **Sub-theme 4.5: Fire stations are important resources**

Fire stations were regarded as important community resources to help and to protect children.

"If your house is on fire they can quickly [put it out]." (Participant 7)

"When you do not have a fire situation and you need water to help you, you might get burned and die. But if there's fire, fire fighters come and help you; you are free and you never going to get burnt." (Participant 9)

"They save people ... from fire." (Participant 5)

"They [children] were climbing a tree with a ladder and ... there is a tree house inside the tree. Then after that their friend took the ladder or after their ladder broke, the fire fighters can come and help. ... They can also stop burning houses." (Participant 10)

The participants saw the need for a fire station for putting out fires, for example when a house is on fire. Participant 10 also mentioned an aspect for which fire stations are known, namely that fire fighters help to rescue people in difficult situations. Hall (2019:249) views access to services as one of the elements that define adequate housing and notes that children who live in informal settlements are more at risk for exposure to shack fires. These dwellings and the risk of fires are unsuitable for children's healthy development (Nelson Mandela Children's Fund, 2023:36).

3.4.2.5 Theme 5: Environments that support children's well-being

Two requirements for the environments in which children live were suggested by the participants. Firstly, the environment must be healthy and without pollution and, secondly, the environment should be safe for children.

- **Sub-theme 5.1 The environment must be healthy and without pollution**

The participants emphasised the importance of a clean environment for children's well-being and suggested that pollution is the primary cause of environmental harm.

"Clean air ... Pollution can damage it; it can damage the environment ... And then also water; it can damage water." (Participant 1)

"They throw rubbish in oceans and forests. And it kills animals, and you need animals." (Participant 9)

"It should be a healthy environment. A place with lots of trees for oxygen for like a better, a better breathing state. ... Clean air is ... keeping us healthy. We need to just have clean air. Cos like we have coronas in the air and another virus is in the air. We can get sick. We would not want that." (Participant 3)

"We need forests because we need trees because if we don't have trees, we don't have oxygen. ... Pollution is a bad thing because uhm, a lot of pollution ... can make the world a bad place. ... Pollution can infect animals and if we don't have animals, we won't have food, and [pollution] can cause sicknesses." (Participant 4)

"Forests have a lot of trees and clean air comes from trees." (Participant 5)

The above views highlight that a polluted environment and polluted air, water, oceans and forests do not only harm children's health, but the harm extends to killing animals needed by people. Importantly, the participants discussed the value of trees and clean oceans, which all contribute to conserving environment. The environment is either naturally formed or created by humans (Adams et al., 2019:556). Greene and Greene (2009:1020) state that identifying the causes of harming the environment is crucial as future harm can be avoided when present harm is identified and dealt with. It is therefore important to pay attention to environmental challenges. The SDGs suggest that there must be a focus on the management and conservation of forests and oceans, and on climate change (Grainger-Brown & Malekpour, 2019:1; Lombard, 2015:486-487).

The participants' views on the importance of a clean natural environment for children were also found in a study by Adams and Savahl (2017:434). These authors indicate that environmental problems such as pollution had an influence on child well-being as polluted natural spaces prevented children from playing in there. On the other hand, environmentally friendly areas where children can also participate in the conservation of natural resources had a positive influence on the children's subjective well-being (Adams et al., 2019:556). Patel

(2015:295) recommends that recycling is one of the ways that can be utilised in protecting the environment. Recycling is also a human capital strategy that can be utilised to maintain the community's standard of living. The importance of the environment is acknowledged globally as the environment, together with the economic and social dimensions, is one of the three core dimensions for sustainable development (Berglund & Gericke, 2016:1117).

- **Sub-theme 5.2: Children must live in safe environments**

Safety concerns expressed by the participants show their awareness of the dangers of crimes, especially crimes against children.

“Safety is something that everyone needs ... There are kidnappings ... people that kill kids.” (Participant 1)

“Safety is when you are safe from danger ... If you have a house, then you are safe from people who want to break in. And if you go in the public and there is someone to help you keep you safe. Then you won't get kidnapped.” (Participant 4)

“And like no crimes. Like it's safe for us to go out and know that you're going to be safe and not get hurt in anyway ... I feel like kidnapping can happen ... Like rape ... Maybe even sometimes murder by a serial killer.” (Participant 3)

Children's social well-being, which includes their mental and social health, is enhanced by positive interactions within their environment (Rahdarzadeh & Adibisedeh, 2016:194). The research findings show that children do not want to live in an environment where they are always fearful of being harmed. Instead, they desire an environment that provides them with a sense of safety. In their South African study, Adams and Savahl (2017:431-432) found that threats to safety such as gang violence and crime negatively affected children's subjective well-being. Furthermore, increased rates of crime were often found in impoverished communities. Of concern, is that many South African children live in impoverished communities despite South Africa's progress in the implementation of the SDGs. The extent of poverty and inequality in the country exposes many children to adverse childhood experiences, which include exposure to violence or crime (Lake et al., 2019:32; Nelson Mandela Children's Fund, 2023:50; Rees & Main, 2015:30; SAHRC & UNICEF, 2016:5).

Safety is one of the indicators according to which children's well-being is evaluated (Buck et al., 2018:1254; Nadan & Kaye-Tzadok, 2019:463). In the 2020 Children's World Report, South Africa was indicated as amongst the most unsafe countries in the world (Rees, Savahl, Lee & Casas, 2020:71). The ecological systems theory suggests that factors in children's wider environment can affect their well-being (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:813). Witnessing violence in their neighbourhood is traumatic for children, causing them to view their environment as unsafe (Buck et al., 2018:1263). For many children, experiencing crime leads to loneliness,

low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress symptoms and behaviour problems (Lund, Abrahams, Garman, Van der Westhuizen & Sorsdahl, 2021/2022:46; Savahl et al., 2013:582). It is therefore important to create safe neighbourhoods for children.

3.4.2.6 Theme 6: What can children do to enhance child well-being?

This theme focuses on the participants' suggestions on how children themselves can play a role in enhancing the well-being of all children.

- **Sub-theme 6.1: Children can help to keep their environment clean**

Some of the participants suggested that children can play an active role in enhancing their well-being by participating in efforts to keep their environment clean. The environment included their homes and the neighbourhood.

"We need to keep our area clean 'cos if we don't keep our area clean, all the dirty things are not going to be good for our baby sisters, our uncles, aunties, mother and father." (Participant 6)

"Respect their home, as in like clean it up when your parents tell you to do that." (Participant 1)

"Because people who are driving past with their cars they throw the papers out, to keep their cars clean. ... [Children] can put out posters anywhere. They can even knock on their neighbours' doors and give them posters saying: please pick up your paper when you drive or when you are here at home." (Participant 10)

From the above quotes, it is evident that a clean environment in the home, but also in the wider community, is good for children. Samuels et al. (2020:2) note that children's participation in daily activities provide them with opportunities to develop competencies. A feeling of personal competence support resilience in children (Louw & Louw, 2014:431; Van Breda & Theron, 2018:243). For children, the neighbourhood is an important part of their community (Buck et al., 2018:1255). Participant 10 suggested that children can engage in ways to educate others about keeping the neighbourhood clean. Lombard and Viviers (2014:84) advocate for children's right to participate in matters that affect them and state that social workers and other professionals should promote children's participation in efforts to ensure sustainable futures.

- **Sub-theme 6.2: Children can engage positively with others**

Some participants felt it would benefit children if they took responsibility for positive interactions with other people in their lives, including their parents, grandparents, friends, teachers and even people they do not know personally.

"You have to honour your parents and grandmother and grandfather ... To honour is to show respect so that they can respect you, love you and honour you. ... Teachers ... are teaching you, they are showing respect and honour and telling you to respect [others], to worship God and telling you to do the right thing ... to

honour their teachers, to honour their grandfathers and grandmothers.”
(Participant 8)

“By respecting people around you, and they can also respect you and by being kind to other people ... Like maybe if you see a homeless person, you can maybe help them. Like they need some money, like being kind to other people, maybe helping the with something.” (Participant 4)

“They can ... talk with their parents or friends ... What they did at school... Or what happened when they played with their friends.” (Participant 10)

Experiencing positive relationships is regarded as one of the elements of a person's well-being and one of the aspects according to which children's well-being is evaluated (Buck et al., 2018:1254; Nadan & Kaye-Tzadok, 2019:463; Ruggeri et al., 2020:2). The participants mentioned relationships within different microsystems that affect children's lives, for example the home, school, peer group and their neighbourhood or community (Arnett & Maynard, 2017:25; Louw et al., 2014:29). Several studies found that children's mental well-being is enhanced by positive interpersonal relationships within the microsystem (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:814; Newland et al., 2019:398). Positive relationships between children and their parents, children and their peers, and children and their teachers were found to be protective factors of children's well-being (Fattore & Mason, 2017:279-280; Kim et al., 2019:13-14; Newland, 2014:1339).

The participants suggested that children themselves should take responsibility for positive engagements with others. This suggestion is important for children's well-being as the ecological systems theory states that interactions in the microsystem are bidirectional, which implies that a friendly or respectful child is likely to evoke positive reactions from others (Berk, 2013:27). Positive actions by children could therefore contribute to positive interpersonal relationships. The developmental approach utilised in social work interventions encourages social workers to promote independence and create awareness of the positives that people possess. One way of doing so is to provide opportunities that encourage children to participate in their well-being (Lane & Pritzker, 2018:91).

3.4.2.7 Theme 7: What can adults do to enhance children's well-being?

In response to a question on how adults could enhance children's well-being, the participants suggested that adults should take responsibility the well-being of all children and also motivate children to do their best.

- **Sub-theme 7.1: All adults should protect and guide children**

The research findings revealed that children need to be protected by all adults in their community. The protection they need is not just related to their physical safety, but also to sustaining their food supply.

“In the neighbourhood where there’s people that know your parents well; so, let’s say that you got lost and then after that you went to your neighbour’s house and asked them to show you your house and you know the house number, but you forgot how your house looked like. And then your neighbour will call your parents. ... [also, a] farm where they are growing crops like lettuce, mealies and tomatoes and cabbage ... So that they can get their healthy foods from there, because most children eat unhealthy food like sugary lolly pops, sweet stuff.” (Participant 10)

“Not getting hurt ... maybe someone beating them. Another person can stand up for the children not to be hurt.” (Participant 5)

“There should be like an anti-bully [centre] like if you get bullied there’s this community where you can talk about how you’re being bullied and how it can stop. ... I feel that the children can also like, tell a neighbour, try to call the police or call the child line service.” (Participant 3)

In line with what was suggested by the participants, Lund et al. (2021/2022:45) state that “[n]eighbourhoods beyond the family setting should provide an environment in which children and adolescents can develop safely and thrive” and include both the social and environmental characteristics of the area. The participants suggested informal support by adults living in the community as well as more formal support systems, for example local farms producing food to ensure healthy nutrition for children and services that can support children who have been exposed to adverse experiences such as bullying.

The participants’ suggestions for the role of all adults in the community can be related to the concept of *ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* characterises the worldview of the indigenous black peoples of Sub-Saharan Africa and is based on the idea that ‘it takes a village to raise a child.’ Accordingly, *ubuntu* supports the idea that children’s potential is best developed through interactions and relational conditions created by a child’s family and community members. *Ubuntu* promotes human well-being through three central pillars: regard for others, regard for the self, and regard for the environment (Mugumbate & Cherini, 2019:28-29). Van Breda (2019:442) notes that *ubuntu* links with the “core social work value of social justice” which is associated with equality for all members of society. Social workers can therefore consider *ubuntu* in implementing prevention and early intervention services that create conditions to enhance the well-being of individuals, groups and communities (Department of Social Development, 2013:29). Social workers also focus on empowering people to better their own lives by enhancing their understanding of their social situation (Patel, 2015:123). This goal could be attained through awareness programmes about child well-being in communities.

Sub-theme 7.2: Adults can motivate children to do their best

The participants suggested that emotional support from the adults in their lives is imperative for children’s well-being. Through emotional support children are encouraged to try new activities and aim for success.

“Parents and adults. ... they must just involve them [children] in their plans. [And] I feel like teacher should be in children’s lives ... We have like this one teacher ... He is the best teacher in our school because he’s fun; he’s fun to be around, he [motivates] us.” (Participant 2)

“Maybe a kid plays soccer. Then maybe he is really good at soccer. They tell him that ‘You are really good at soccer’. That makes him success[full].” (Participant 5)

“They must be good at things like at school ... When the teachers ask him a question [and] ...when they say [answer] it, the teacher says, ‘You’re really clever’. It makes a kid really happy.” (Participant 5)

Children, especially those in middle childhood as was the case with the participants, experience a feeling of success when they can finish meaningful tasks and receive support and acknowledgement for it (Martorell et al., 2014:395; Thomas, 2005:93). Support and encouragement could thus motivate children to do their best. However, children who do not receive support or encouragement may not develop to their full potential (Thomas, 2005:93). Children’s mental well-being is associated with a positive self-esteem (Minkinen, 2013:550), which implies that motivation by adults to do well could support their well-being.

Additionally, the participants mentioned the role of teachers in motivating children to do their best. Oriol, Torres, Miranda, Bilbao & Ortúzar (2017:150) state that children’s behaviour is affected by the teacher-child relationship. When this relationship is positive, it can enhance a child’s social and academic functioning. This relationship can also make the child perceive school as a safe place and can buffer children against other challenges that they could be facing in the home.

One participant further mentioned that adults should include children in matters in which they may be involved. This aspect supports the right of children to participate in matters that affect them, as described in international, regional and local legislative frameworks, for example CRC, the ACRWC and the Children’s Act 38 of 2005, that were discussed in the literature in Chapter 2, Section 2.5.

In conclusion, the participants’ views on factors that can affect children’s well-being are generally in line with the views of Bhardwaj et al. (2017:22). These authors note that children’s well-being can be enhanced through interventions that focus on ending poverty, hunger and malnutrition; promoting their living conditions and access to services and education; and ensuring clean air and that children live in safe and sustainable environments.

3.5 SUMMARY

This chapter contained a discussion of the research methodology as well as the ethical considerations that were applied during the implementation of the study. Furthermore, the empirical findings of the study were presented in themes and sub-themes to highlight the

perspectives of the participants on the concept of child well-being and factors that could influence children's well-being. The key findings of the study will be summarised in Chapter 4, followed by conclusions based on the findings and recommendations for practice and research.

CHAPTER 4

KEY FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Child well-being is a multidimensional construct consisting of several domains or dimensions and requires taking the child's environment into account (Naidoo & Muthukrishna, 2016:2; Savahl et al., 2013:580). For this reason, the ecological systems theory was the theoretical framework of the study to better understand the well-being of children (Burns et al., 2015:250). The ecological systems theory considers various interconnected systems that influence the lives of children. Many research studies on child well-being and factors that could influence it have been conducted based on the perspectives of adults and other professionals who work with children. However, it is crucial to understand children's well-being from their own perspectives (Lloyd & Emerson, 2017:594; Casas, 2019:334). This study was implemented to explore the perspectives of children on child well-being and of factors in their environment that could influence children's well-being.

The primary focus of this chapter is to discuss the key findings of the study and conclusions drawn from the findings, and to present recommendations for practice and research. The researcher will further demonstrate that the goal and the objectives of the study were accomplished.

4.2 GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The goal of the study was to explore children's perspectives on their well-being as a pathway to a sustainable future within the South African context, based on a case study in the Brits and Rustenburg areas in North West Province.

The following objectives were stated for achieving the goal of the study:

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

4.3 KEY FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The key findings of the study are summarised according to the themes and sub-themes in the research findings.

4.3.1 Signs that it is going well with the child

The participants explained that one would be able to determine whether it is going well with a child by findings out whether a child is happy, cared for and loved.

- Most participants believed that children who are well will be happy. Factors that could support happiness include playing and spending time with others, while their happiness could be compromised by factors such as poverty and a lack of attention from their parents.
- Being cared for was seen as important for children's well-being, and meant that children's needs are met, that they have access to education, are shown respect, are supported, and are protected from others who would want to harm them.
- Child well-being also meant that children feel loved by their parents, family and friends. The participants especially noted the importance of a positive family environment where they feel loved and where family members spend time with one another.

4.3.2 People who are important for children's well-being

People in the child's microsystem were regarded as playing an important role in children's well-being. Pets were also mentioned as contributing to children's well-being.

- The participants believed that children need parents to provide them with care and guidance. Fathers are expected to support the family economically while mothers provide in needs such as provision of food, housekeeping and teaching life skills. Parents are also expected to protect, discipline and socialise children so that they can live positive lives.
- Siblings were seen as contributing to children's well-being. Younger siblings can be comforted by older brothers and sisters when they are in distress. Siblings can also confide in one another when they experience emotional distress and protect each other from bullies and in conflicts with other children.
- The findings revealed that good friends can support each other through various life challenges. Friends can provide practical support, for example when not having food at school, or emotional support through trust and companionship or when children have conflicts in the home with their parents. Children often confide in friends when they find it difficult to discuss problems with their parents.

- When parents are away from home due to work obligations, grandparents, aunts, and uncles can step in as caregivers. The fact that their grandparents are participating in fun activities with them leaves children happy.
- The participants believed that teachers could play a crucial role in children's well-being in providing education and paving the way for future success. Teachers can also provide learners with emotional support, if needed. However, the behaviour of some teachers cause distress to their pupils, which affect children's emotional and educational well-being.
- Most of the participants saw pets as important for children's well-being as pets show love, provide companionship, protect children and support them when they experience negative emotions or distressing social interactions. One participant recounted the profound emotional pain he felt after losing his dogs to death, highlighting the unique bond children may have with pets.

4.3.3 Resources in the caregiving environment that support children's well-being

The participants mentioned that having resources to support their caregiving needs would contribute to the well-being of children.

- Children need shelter to protect them from natural and man-made dangers and for providing a place that offers them safety and the freedom to be themselves. The participants highlighted challenges that children face due to not having shelter, which include being exposed to harsh weather conditions that lead to illnesses as well as exposure to crime.
- Healthy foods were seen as necessary for children's physical and nutritional health. The participants explained the challenges of not having access to food, for example becoming ill and not being able to concentrate at school.
- Clothes were seen to enhance children's well-being by serving various practical purposes, for example privacy and protecting them from weather conditions. The participants emphasised the importance of school uniforms, which could show that children belong to a certain school and prevent discrimination at school. The literature reveals the importance of school uniforms but also indicates that a uniform could result in children being targeted.
- The critical importance of clean water and sanitation for children's well-being was highlighted by the participants. Clean water is important for hydration, cleaning oneself and for the prevention of illness due to contaminated water. Sanitation, which was related to adequate toilet facilities, support children's dignity as it offers privacy and safety and would avoid the risks presented by using pit toilets.

- The participants suggested that all children should have electricity for performing everyday tasks, for example for the family to cook meals, for children charging cell phones to keep in contact with parents and others, and for watching television for enjoyment or gaining information.
- The participants were in support of children having access to the Internet and having electronic devices such as cell phones and laptops. These devices were important for communication with family and friends, for educational purposes and for enjoyment, for example playing online games. They were also aware of the potential harm when people exploit children on online platforms.

4.3.4 Community resources that support children's well-being

Community resources were regarded as important and the participants suggested ways in which different resources could enhance children's well-being.

- Schools were seen as essential community resources as children need a good education to prepare them for a successful future and increase their chances of gaining employment. In addition, schools offer settings where children could make friends, which would enhance their social well-being.
- The participants suggested that there should be churches in communities that children and families can attend. At church children could learn about their religion, positive behaviours, and even get material help through donations to the church. Furthermore, spirituality could support children's well-being by making them feel loved, cared for and protected.
- Access to hospitals and clinics would ensure that children and their families can obtain medical services to restore their health. It is noted in the literature that poor health can have wide-ranging effects on children, not only affecting their physical well-being but also their mental and cognitive well-being.
- The participants identified the need for parks, playgrounds and sport facilities in communities as it would enable children to exercise, play, work together as a team and participate in enjoyable activities. Participating in sports would have physical and social benefits as well as motivate children to strive for a personal goal in future.
- Fire stations were seen as important to put out fires and save people. Fire services can, for example, help in cases where children's homes are on fire. Firemen can also help children in distress, such as a child being stuck in a tree.

4.3.5 Environments that support children's well-being

The participants described the conditions that children's environment must have to enhance their well-being.

- They firstly emphasised that the environment should be clean and unpolluted. Pollution of the air, water, forests and oceans not only harms the people but also the animals and fish that live in the forests and oceans. When the animals and fish are harmed, it could in turn lead to limited access to food for people.
- The participants mentioned the dangers that children are exposed to in their neighbourhoods, hence children need environments that are safe. A safe environment protects children from dangers such as crime. Community members must also play a role in protecting children from danger.

4.3.6 Children can be involved in enhancing their own well-being

The participants believed that children can actively get involved in enhancing their well-being and made some suggestions on how they could be involved.

- Children should take responsibility for caring for their own environment as a clean environment is beneficial for children and for their families. A clean environment includes a clean home; therefore, children should listen to their parents and keep their homes clean. Children can also create awareness in their communities by means of posters prompting community members to be actively involved in keeping their environment clean.
- Furthermore, children could enhance their well-being by the way in which they engage with others. Positive interactions with their parents, grandparents, teachers, and others in their environment could benefit children through the positive reactions they receive in exchange.

4.3.7 What adults can do to enhance children's well-being

The participants suggested ways in which adults could enhance children's well-being.

- They believed that all adults should look out for the well-being of all children in their neighbourhood. Community members could prevent children from getting harmed by helping to protect and guide them.
- In addition, community resources could be created to support the well-being of children. Social services could be made available to assist children who may need it, and crops can be grown on communal farms to provide food to children who are in need.

- Adults should furthermore encourage children to do their best to ensure that they grow to their optimal potential. Parents and teachers who acknowledge children's efforts will motivate them to be successful in what they do.

4.4 CONCLUSIONS

Based on information from the literature review and the empirical findings, the following conclusions were drawn:

- The participants' responses provide evidence that children are aware of factors that constitute child well-being. Many of the participants' suggestions correlate with adult views on child well-being. Children therefore need to be given an opportunity to be heard when it comes matters related to their well-being and the knowledge shared by them should not be ignored or overlooked. Social workers must advocate for child participation especially in terms of the implementation of policies that affect children and their well-being.
- Children's well-being is influenced by the environment in which they live. Due to their age and vulnerability, children are dependent on others for enhancing their well-being. The family, as the primary context in which children grow up, plays a principal role in this regard while others such as friends, grandparents or extended family members, teachers and even pets could support children's well-being. Persons in the child's microsystem are thus especially important for children's well-being.
- Meeting children's basic needs, including their needs for shelter, nutritional food, appropriate clothing, clean water and sanitation, and electricity, is critical for ensuring their well-being. The Internet and electronic devices, which are described in literature as the techno-subsystem that forms part of the microsystem, can provide information and links with others that can support children, provided that the risks of the Internet are avoided. South African studies, however, show that many children live in poverty, which hampers parent's ability for meeting children's basic needs and negatively affects children's well-being. As an example, measures to illegally access electricity can lead to shack fires, while pit toilets rob children of their dignity and are unsafe for children.
- Community resources such as schools, churches, hospitals and clinics, parks and sports facilities, and fire stations support different aspects of children's well-being, including their physical, emotional, educational, and social well-being, and help them to develop to their full potential and ensure a sustainable future. Providing sufficient and relevant community resources to contribute to children's well-being must therefore be prioritised. Studies show that there are still significant numbers of South African children who lack access to community resources needed for their well-being.

- As also described in the literature, the research findings show that one well-being domain influences the others. As an example, a lack of food affects children's physical well-being but also their ability to concentrate at school, thus their educational well-being. In addition, access to parks does not only benefit children physically but also enhances their social and mental well-being and results in them becoming adults that contribute to society. These benefits can help in attaining sustainable futures for children.
- In suggesting the role of adults in enhancing children's well-being, the participants emphasised the concept of Ubuntu. Adults should assist any child that need their help even if they do not know the child. This will ensure children's safety in their communities and prevent them from being exposed to crime or other harm. Furthermore, adults can take responsibility for developing social services and community resources to support children and give positive feedback to children to motivate them to reach their full potential.
- Children can also play an active part in enhancing their own well-being and this fact should not be overlooked by adults. Adults can therefore involve children in age-appropriate activities to empower them to contribute to their own well-being.
- The social work profession focuses on the well-being of people and aims to empower people to reach their full potential. Social workers can therefore play a significant role in enhancing the well-being of children. Interventions should take children's views of well-being into account by respecting their views. Furthermore, interventions should empower children, for example by teaching them life skills, and should focus on protecting children against all forms of harm.

4.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research findings and conclusions, the researcher offers suggestions for social workers, policy makers and other professionals working with children to take into account in their practice.

- Social workers must accept responsibility for enhancing the well-being of children to contribute to sustainable futures for all children. A focus on prevention and early intervention should be prioritised to prevent children from exposure to harmful social problems. In addition, social workers should ensure child participation as listening to children's views can result in interventions being relevant to children's well-being.
- Social workers can promote the principles underlying Ubuntu to enhance conducive environments for children. Involving community members in promoting the well-being of children can create positive environments in which children can live and develop and

prevent the possibility of children being affected by adverse childhood experiences. Social workers need to do their part in addressing this issue, for example through creating awareness and educating the community to know their rights and responsibilities when it comes to the well-being of children. Awareness programmes can be presented at community centres, schools and churches, amongst others.

- Interventions must focus on all domains of child well-being and include different strategies to address issues affecting children's well-being. Interventions can, for example, focus on adequate nutrition, social security, access to schools, clean water and sanitation, access to health care services, positive parenting skills, and safe communities (including safe spaces for play). Such interventions will benefit the present and future well-being of children.
- Social workers can advocate for children's well-being by informing governments and policy makers about the importance of child well-being for sustainable futures. The government can ensure child well-being by employing more social workers and by providing relevant services and resources. Apart from the time spent at their homes, children spend a large part of their time at school. By employing social workers in schools, social workers can work collaboratively with teachers and parents and implement services and programmes that can enhance the well-being of children and their families.

Recommendations are also suggested in terms of research on child well-being.

- Studies show that South African children are exposed to many adverse circumstances that affect their well-being. Further research studies on children's well-being can provide information on conditions and services that could be considered in enhancing the well-being of all children.
- Further research can also be conducted to compare the views of children from different age groups and in different social contexts on what child well-being entails.

4.6 ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE GOAL OF THE STUDY

The goal of the study was to explore children's perspectives on child well-being as a pathway to sustainable futures within the South African context, based on a case study in the Brits and Rustenburg areas in North West Province. Following, the accomplishment of the objectives of the study will be discussed to indicate the achievement of the goal of the study.

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

Child well-being was conceptualised in the literature review in Chapter 2 of this study. The chapter contains a discussion of child well-being and elaborates on the interconnected factors that contribute to child well-being by highlighting protective and risk factors that could influence children's well-being. Furthermore, the well-being of South African children, legislative frameworks that can support child well-being and the potential role of social workers in addressing the well-being of children were discussed. The ecological systems theory formed the theoretical framework for the study and was discussed in Chapter 1.

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

Objective 2 has been accomplished by exploring the participants' views on how one would recognise a child who experiences well-being. The participants indicated that a child who is well will be happy, cared for and will feel loved. These findings were presented in Chapter 3 under the empirical findings of the study.

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

In exploring this aspect, the participants mentioned factors such as the role of the family, friends, the extended family, teachers and even pets in supporting children's well-being. In addition to the role of parents and siblings, the participants highlighted how extended family members can assume the role of their parents during their parents' absence. It was also believed that teachers could adopt a supportive role towards children. The findings related to this objective were described in Chapter 3.

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

The participants shared their views on the importance of socio-economic resources for children's well-being, including the need for shelter, food, proper clothing and school uniforms, access to water, sanitation and electricity, and access to electronic devices. Access to these sources was seen as enhancing children's well-being. These findings were discussed in Chapter 3.

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

The research findings presented in Chapter 3 show that the participants were aware of the importance of a clean and unpolluted environment for the well-being of children as well as for

the well-being of animals. A point highlighted by the participant was that environments should also be safe for children to feel free to do activities in the environment.

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

The participants believed that children would be able to participate in efforts to enhance child well-being by taking responsibility for keeping their environment clean, but also by deliberately seeking to engage positively with others. They, however, recognised that they would need the help of parents and adults to be safe in the wider environment. Adults could also motivate children to do their best, which would contribute to children's well-being. These findings were also discussed in Chapter 3.

The achievement of the above objectives provide evidence that the goal of the study has been achieved. The research question – *“What are children's perspectives on child well-being as a pathway to sustainable futures within the South African context based on a case study in the Brits and Rustenburg areas in North West Province?”* – was therefore also answered.

4.7 CONCLUDING STATEMENT

This study focused on the concept of child well-being from the perspectives of a sample of children in middle childhood. The well-being of children is a topic that receives increasing attention in the literature and in research studies, and children's views of the concept receive increasing attention. As children's well-being is closely linked to sustainable futures for the next generations, it is critical that social workers and other professionals attend to services that can be delivered according to an ecological approach that will include all aspects in children's environments that can affect their well-being.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

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

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

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. How old are you?

8	9	10	11	12
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2. How do you describe your gender?

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

3. In what school grade are you?

Grade

4. How many people live in your household? (e.g. parents, siblings, extended family such as grandparents, uncles/aunts, nieces/nephews) Number: Adults: Children:
Please tell me about them.

5. Who contributes to the income in your household?

(childcare grant; old age grant; formal / informal jobs)

SECTION B: QUESTIONS ON CHILD WELL-BEING

1. How will you know if it is going well with a child?
(e.g. emotions, health, physical wellness, positive development, doing well at school, care by parents)
2. Who (which people) should be in a child's life for a child to live well?
(e.g. family, parents, grandparents, extended family, siblings, teachers, friends, pets ...)
What must they be like?
3. What must children have for them to live well?
(a home, family income, parental work, money, clothing, food, pocket money, TV, cell phone, internet access, transport, safety ...)
4. What places and services in their community will help children to live well?
(house, school, clinic, hospital, park, church ...)
5. What must children's environment look like for them to live well?
(clean water, clean air, green spaces, clean environment ...)
6. What can children do in their homes, in their community and for the environment to improve their own well-being?
7. How can adults involve children in their plans and programmes to improve children's well-being?

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

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

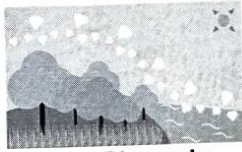
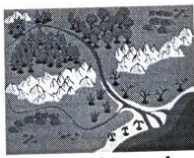
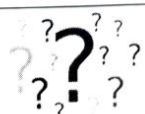
APPENDIX B

VISUAL COMMUNICATION CARDS

WHAT IS WELL-BEING?		
 Happy	 Healthy	 Successful
 Loved	 Cared for	 Anything else that you can think of?
WHO MUST BE IN CHILDREN'S LIVES FOR THEM TO LIVE WELL?		
 Family	 Father and mother	 Brothers and sisters
 Grandfather, grandmother	 Uncles and aunts	 Friends
 Teacher	 Pets	 Anyone else that you can think of?

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

WHAT MUST CHILDREN HAVE TO LIVE WELL?		
 House	 School	 Clinic/hospital
 Church	 Park	 Shop
 Food	 Clothes	 Books
 Electricity	 Water	 Sanitation / toilets
 Transport	 Television	 Cell phone, laptop
The images are available on the open platform Online Pictures, and licensed under CC BY-SA-NC		

 Safety	 Sport	 School uniforms and shoes
 Fire station	 Anything else that you can think of?	
WHAT MUST THE WORLD/ENVIRONMENT LOOK LIKE FOR CHILDREN TO LIVE WELL?		
 Clean neighbourhood	 Clean water	 Clean air
 No pollution	 Forests; clean rivers and oceans	 People who keep their neighbourhood clean
 Anything else that you can think of?		 Thank you!

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

APPENDIX C

ETHICS APPROVAL



Faculty of Humanities
Fakulteit Geesteswetenskappe
Lefapha la Bomotheo



2 September 2021

Dear Mrs MR Bila

Project Title: Children's perspectives on well-being: A pathway to sustainable futures
Researcher: Mrs MR Bila
Supervisor(s): Dr MP le Roux
Department: Social Work and Criminology
Reference number: 16124686 (HUM020/0821)
Degree: Masters

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

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

We wish you success with the project.

Sincerely,

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

Research Ethics Committee Members: Prof KL Harris (Chair); Mr A Bizos; Dr A-M de Beer; Dr A dos Santos; Dr P Gutura; Ms KT Govinder Andrew; Dr E Johnson; Dr D Krige; Prof D Maree; Mr A Mohamed; Dr I Noomé; Dr J Okeke; Dr C Puttergill; Prof D Reyburn; Prof M Soer; Prof E Taljard; Ms D Mokalapa

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APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER



Researcher: Mmatshupa Rosinah Bila (Student number 16124686)
Degree: MSW Play-based Intervention
Contact details: 076 896 9099

INFORMED CONSENT BY PARENT/GUARDIAN

1. Title of the study

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

2. Goal of the study

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

3. Procedures

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

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

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

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

4. Possible risks

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

5. Benefits of participation

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

6. Rights as a participant

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

7. Confidentiality

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

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

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

9. Data usage

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

10. Contact details

If I need more information about this research, I can contact the researcher at her e-mail at rosinabila@yahoo.com or on her cell number as provided above.

11. Permission for participation in the research study

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

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

Parent/guardian: _____ Date: _____

Researcher: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX E

INFORMED ASSENT LETTER



Researcher: Mmatshupa Rosinah Bila (Student number 16124686)
Degree: MSW Play-based Intervention
Contact details: 076 896 9099

PARTICIPANT'S INFORMED ASSENT FORM

Dear participant



My name is Mmatshupa Rosinah Bila and I am doing research at the University of Pretoria on how children understand child well-being. With child well-being, I mean a life that enables children to grow up happy and healthy and make a success in life. Research is a study to find new information about something, and I am known as the researcher. For this study, I will talk to children about how they understand the well-being of children and will ask them questions about things they think can help children to live a good life, now and in the future. The title of my study is as follows: *Children's perspectives on child well-being: A pathway to sustainable futures*.

The reason for the study

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

What will you be asked to do?



If you agree to take part in the study, you will be a research participant and I, the researcher, will talk to you about your ideas about things that can help with children's well-being. We will

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talk for about 45 to 60 minutes. I will make a voice recording, if it is fine with you, to remember all the information that you share. All the information will be handled confidentially, meaning that no one but I will know what you said in our discussion.

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

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

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

Your rights during the study



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

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

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

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

What If you have questions?



If you have any questions, you can contact me, the researcher, at cell number 076 896 9099 or send me an email at rosinahbila@yahoo.com. You will also get a chance to ask me questions about the study before our discussion as well as at the end of our discussion.

My decision



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

☐ Yes, I would like to join the study.



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



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

Name of participant _____

Date _____

Name of researcher _____

Date _____

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