

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

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 (15042392/HUM033/0821).

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

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Child well-being is a multi-dimensional concept that includes physical, mental, social, cognitive, material, and environmental domains, which are interrelated. Children's well-being influences their quality of life during childhood and later as adults, and is influenced by the social, economic, and environmental contexts in which they live. Many children in South Africa live in contexts that have negative effects on their well-being, for example poverty, negative family environments, and high levels of crime. Research on child well-being tend to focus on information gained from adults. This study – one of a group research project – aimed to explore children's perspectives on child well-being as a pathway to sustainable futures for them. The ecological systems theory formed the theoretical framework of the study.

To explore children's subjective well-being, an interpretivist research paradigm and a qualitative research approach were followed. As applied research, the research findings could inform social work practice. The instrumental case study design was relevant for gaining an understanding on what well-being meant a sample of 11 children in middle childhood who were recruited means of purposive and snowball sampling within two communities in Mpumalanga province. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews based on an interview schedule as well as visual communication cards and analysed by means of thematic analysis. The study was conducted by following relevant research ethical principles.

The participants identified children who are living well as those who are happy, healthy, loved, cared for and successful, and viewed factors in the microsystem as especially important for children's well-being. Parents, siblings, extended family members, pets, teachers, and friends as well as positive home and school environments were seen as important for children's well-being. Furthermore, meeting children's basic needs, access to community resources such as housing, schools and healthcare services, and a clean and unpolluted natural environment would enhance child well-being. The participants believed that children could play an active role in improving their own well-being and influence conditions that shape child well-being.

The study shows that children in middle childhood can participate in matters related to child well-being. Social workers and other professionals must thus take children's perspectives into account. Children's well-being must be a priority to ensure sustainable futures for them and

social workers must act as advocates by focusing on factors in all ecological levels that influence the well-being of children. To gain more comprehensive information on child well-being in South Africa, it is recommended that more research studies on the topic be conducted with diverse study samples and in diverse contexts.

KEY CONCEPTS

Child

Child well-being

Sustainable development

Sustainable future

Child participation

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CHAPTER 1

GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Well-being relates to the quality of life of an individual and is reflected in a person's state of being healthy, happy, or prosperous, and finding a balance between positive and negative emotions (Ben-Arieh, Casas, Frønes & Korbin, 2014:1; Brockevelt, Cerny, Newland & Lawler, 2019:589). Well-being is a multi-dimensional construct and is influenced by the state of numerous dimensions, including a person's emotions, education, living conditions, health, and income (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014:1; Lloyd & Emerson, 2017:593). Well-being is generally determined by objective and subjective indicators, where objective indicators include aspects such as education, household income and health status and subjective indicators involve aspects such as a person's life satisfaction and perception of happiness (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014:1; Lloyd & Emerson, 2017:593; Statham & Chase, 2010:2). People's well-being has an impact on their present life experiences as well as on their future (De Neve, Diener, Tay & Xuereb, 2013:12).

Child well-being is described as children's experience of positive physical, mental, social, and material conditions (Minkinen, 2013:549). The focus thereof is on the whole child, referring to aspects such as safety, physical health, educational achievements, behaviour, as well as the emotional, psychological, cognitive, and social development of the child (Moore, 2013:3; Naidoo & Muthukrishna, 2016:2). The well-being of children has a significant impact on their emotional, physical, social, environmental, and spiritual welfare as well as on their development into adulthood (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014:3; Nahkur & Kutsar, 2019:355). It is therefore important to improve the social, environmental, and economic well-being of all people, including children, as proposed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015:3). These improvements will create a world where children are healthy and protected and live in a clean environment, as stipulated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UNICEF, 2018).

Children's well-being is influenced by protective and risk factors in their environment. Protective factors decrease the chances of negative outcomes for children and include aspects such as a stable and positive home environment, good educational achievement, supportive friendships, and having their basic needs met (Brockevelt et al., 2019:589-590; Fattore & Mason, 2017:278-279; Holder & Coleman, 2015:81; Ten Bruggencate, Luijckx & Sturm, 2019:1826). On the other hand, risk factors have a negative influence on children's well-being and include poverty and low family income, parental unemployment, low literacy levels, overcrowded households, unsafe environments, and poor environmental quality

(Ayala-Nunes, Jimenez, Jesus, Nunes & Hidalgo, 2018:812; Hall, 2019a:223; Landrigan, 2018:102). Risk factors have a negative influence on the development of children and their outcomes in adulthood (Chaundry & Wimer, 2016:23).

Although there are legislative frameworks that are intended to support child well-being that apply to all children and South Africa's children specifically, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the (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 (RSA, 1996) and South Africa's progress in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015), South African children still experience substantial disadvantages (SAHRC & UNICEF, 2016:3). Children can be seen as a vulnerable group in the South Africa context as their well-being are negatively influenced by different risks and adversities (Naidoo & Muthukrishna, 2016:4). Environmental and socioeconomic issues such as HIV/AIDS, exploitation, climate change, incomplete families, violent crimes and at-risk communities are some of the risks that children are being exposed to (Naidoo & Muthukrishna, 2016:1; Peeters, 2012:287). The influence that adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and other undesirable situations, for example high-risk environments and problems such as poverty and abuse, have on the well-being of children, is reason for concern (Bethell, Simpson & Solloway, 2017:1). Thus, it is important to improve aspects such as the health and care of children to improve the overall well-being of the present and future generations (Grimes, 2017:19).

According to Fattore and Mason (2017:267), well-being is considered as a personal construct, and for that reason children are in the best position to provide their own perspectives of well-being. However, children's perspectives are mostly overlooked because of their age and the focus on child protection that dominates deliberations on the well-being of children (l'Anson, 2013:106). Research on the perspectives of children regarding their own well-being is limited in South Africa (Nadan & Kaye-Tzadok, 2019:464).

In South Africa, social workers work from a developmental approach (Department of Social Development, 2013a:13). Social workers focus on promoting the well-being of and work towards social change for families, individuals, communities, and groups in their social contexts (Patel, 2015:127). To promote child well-being, the social work profession can focus on interventions to enhance children's well-being and sustainable futures for them. Social workers understand that the participation of children as described in the Children's Act 38 of 2005, is important to inform social work intervention. The National Child Participation Framework (2018:10) also supports the participation of children in matters that concern them as their views can promote services that are responsive to their needs and lead the way to lifelong positive results. In this study, the researcher focused on how children in South Africa

perceive child well-being as a pathway to sustainable futures.

1.2 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

The following key concepts are relevant to the study and are as follows:

Child: A child is defined in the Children's Act 25 of 2005 as "a person under the age of 18 years." The participants in this study were between the ages of 8 and 12 years, in the middle childhood phase of development (Louw, Louw & Kail, 2014:8).

Child well-being: Child well-being is a dynamic and holistic process in which positive material, physical, social and mental conditions generally exceed negative conditions (Minkkinen, 2013:549). The well-being of children is a multi-dimensional concept that is characterised by the absence of psychological and psychiatric problems, and comprises of the emotional, cognitive, physical, environmental, spiritual, and social well-being of children (Nahkur & Kutsar, 2019:355). Children's well-being influences their present functioning as well as their future (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014:1). Child well-being can be considered from children's own evaluation and perspectives of their lives; referred to as children's subjective well-being (Minkkinen, 2013:550), or considered based on measurable aspects such as their health, educational levels and economic situation, which refers to objective well-being (Statham & Chase, 2010:5) This study aimed to explore children's perspectives of child well-being; thus, the focus was on children's subjective well-being.

Child participation: Children have the right to actively participate in the aspects that affect their lives, including the processes, decision-making, policies, and programmes that influence their lives (National Child Participation Framework, 2018:09). In this study, child participation refers to providing children with the opportunity to express their views on the topic of child well-being, listening to their views, and presenting their views in the research report so that it can be heard.

Sustainable futures: Sustainable futures is a concept that involves a future characterised by social inclusion, human dignity, and protection of the environment (Global Education Monitoring Report, 2016). Dada, Tönsing, Bornman, Samuels, Johnson and Morwane (2022) refer to positive futures for children in terms of the key principles of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations, 2015), which "are the global elimination of disparities through the improvement of situations for all people as well as a focus on sustainable development." This study focused on understanding child well-being from the perspectives of children as children's well-being can support sustainable futures. Savahl, Tiliouine, Casas, Adams, Mekonene, Dejene, Benninger and Witten (2017:39) emphasise that

governments should take proactive measures to enhance the well-being of children. These measures can include providing for children's basic needs and alleviating poverty and deprivation.

Sustainable development: The term sustainable development refers to the way in which the environmental, economic and social development of the present generation takes into account the needs of future generations and promote the well-being of individuals and the environment without harming that of future generations (Ahenkan & Osei-Kojo, 2014:163). Sustainable development is referred to by The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED, 1987:43 as cited in Peeters, 2012:290) as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Therefore, sustainable development promotes sustainable futures.

1.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Children's development and well-being are associated with the social environment in which they grow up and the mutual interactions between the environment and children (Minkkinen, 2013:548-549). For that reason, child well-being should be understood by taking into consideration several ecological systems that the child interacts with, either indirectly or directly. The interdependence between the child and the environment is understood within ecological systems theory of Urie Bronfenbrenner (Louw et al., 2014:29; UNICEF, 2020a:6) that was the theoretical framework for the study.

Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1995) emphasized that children's developmental occur in a series of ecological systems within the environment (Louw et al., 2014:29). These systems, which include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem, are interdependent and a change in one part of a system will influence another part of the system as well as all the systems (Louw et al., 2014:29; Miley, O'Meila & Dubois, 2009:38). The different systems are arranged in nested rings or levels and each of these have a different impact on the developing child (Henderson & Thompson, 2016:46). The aim of the ecological systems theory is to understand individuals by observing how each one interacts within their environment. Children are in close relationships and interaction within their social settings and culture and in the ecological perspective children's immediate environment as well as the wider layers in their environment can have an influence on children's well-being (Nahkur & Kutsar, 2018:373). The aim of the study was for the researcher to obtain a holistic view of children's perspectives on child well-being and of factors in their physical and social environments that can have an impact on children's well-being (Langer & Lietz, 2014:30). Therefore, the researcher explored the perspectives of children on child well-being in terms of factors in the different ecological systems that could have a negative or positive influence on children's lives and well-being.

The **microsystem** is the innermost system described in the ecological system theory. The microsystem forms the immediate environment of the child and consists of the surroundings in which the child has the most contact, including the family, peers, school, church and the neighbourhood in which the child lives (Arnett & Maynard, 2017:25; Henderson & Thompson, 2016:46; Louw et al., 2014:29). Consequently, this system has its own subsystems in which the child participates directly (Onwuengbuzie, Collins & Frels, 2013:4; Newland, Giger, Lawler, Roh, Brockevelt & Schwenle, 2019:397).

Various studies associate the child's relationships within the microsystems of the family, school and the peer group as having a strong effect on the well-being of children (Louw et al., 2014:29; UNICEF, 2020a:8). Within the family, parenting practices have a strong effect on the child (Henderson & Thompson, 2016:46). Aspects such as psychological problems, parental stress, poor parent-child relationships, and attachment problems can have a negative impact on the well-being of children (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:814; Newland et al., 2019:398). For children, friends are very important as they emphasize the meaning of personal interactions within the microsystem (Casas & Frønes, 2019:6). Children's subjective mental well-being can be negatively influenced by factors in their immediate environment such as poor parenting, negative relationships and limited play areas in their community (Nahkur & Kutsar, 2019:373; UNICEF, 2020a:9). From an ecological perspective, it is important for social workers to understand the systems closest to the child and the influences it has on the child (Langer & Lietz, 2014:33).

The second ecological system, the **mesosystem**, refers to the connection between the different microsystems that have an impact on each other (Henderson & Thompson, 2016:46). The mesosystem includes the interactions between microsystems such as the child's neighbourhood, peers, school, and home environment (Louw et al., 2014:29). A child's academic performance can, for example, be enhanced when parents are involved in the child's learning at home and at school (Louw et al., 2014:29). Berk (2013:27) states that a strong mesosystem is important for children growing up in poverty as connections between microsystems such as schools, after-school programmes, youth groups and enrichment programmes for children such as music and art, can provide support to children and families.

Social workers must therefore assess the relationships between children's microsystems and consider how these systems can have an impact on each other in enhancing the well-being and the development and growth of the child (Langer & Lietz, 2014:33). Nadan and Kaye-Tzadok (2019:472, 474) mention that in modern times children often connect with family and friends and various microsystems by means of online platforms. This environment can have an impact on the subjective well-being of children and should therefore be considered as an aspect that can influence children's well-being.

The **exosystem** is described by Langer and Lietz (2014:33) as the relationship of two systems that have an influence on the third system. This level in the ecological systems thus involves the social settings in which the child is not directly involved, but that will have an indirect influence on the child (Henderson & Thompson, 2016:46). The exosystem consist of two settings, namely the formal setting that includes the media, health care, parents' working environment, community resources and religious institutions; and the informal support and social networks of the extended family and friends (Arnett & Maynard, 2017:25; Berk, 2013:28; Louw et al., 2014:29). Although the exosystem involves the social environment in which the child does not take actively part, the child's development is indirectly influenced by situations and circumstances that take place in the exosystem (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013:4).

Problems such as poverty, social isolation and unemployment have a harmful impact on the exosystem, and thus have negative effects on the child (Berk, 2013:28; Louw et al., 2014:29). Low socioeconomic status or poverty is observed as one of the most influential factors regarding family and child well-being (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:812). To safeguard children against adverse social environments, interventions can be implemented to support parents and to improve the quality of parenting (Alaya-Nunes et al., 2018:814).

The **macrosystem** as the outermost ecological layer presents the wider elements in society that have an impact on the development of children. These elements include the values, culture, resources, customs, legislation, ideologies, programmes, politics and environmental status (Arnett & Maynard, 2017:26; Langer & Lietz, 2014:33-34; Louw et al., 2014:29). The macrosystem includes the culture and sub-culture of society that each have their own value systems and ideologies that have a strong impact on the developing child (Henderson & Thompson, 2016:46; Louw et al., 2014:29-30). As the macrosystem encompasses all the inner ecological systems, the impact of the macrosystem on the subjective well-being of children is also observed in other ecological levels (Newland et al., 2019:398). For example, research has shown that the subjective well-being of children was higher in countries with policies that support aspects such as family services, preschool education, and paid parental leave, and allocate more monetary resources to family benefits (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:814).

The **chronosystem** refers to a time dimension that indicates that the environment of children is not static and can change over time (Berk, 2013:28; Louw et al., 2014:30). The life events and the development of the child as well as the social environment can undergo changes that require adaptation. Some changes relate to the child's development and the growth, for example physical, psychological, and intellectual growth, while other changes relate to the wider and immediate environment of children, for example school entry, the loss of a parent, and relocation (Berk, 2013:28; Louw et al., 2014:30). The dynamic nature and changes that characterise the chronosystem link with well-being as a dynamic process that can change

over time (Casas & Frønes, 2019:2; Minkkinen, 2013:549).

An ecological approach to child well-being provides insight into how children's immediate and wider environments have a direct or indirect influence on their well-being (Alaya-Nunes et al., 2018:816). Therefore, social workers need to consider the interdependence between people and their environment to gain an understanding of how people function and deal with stressors (Masoga & Shokane, 2017:4). The ecological systems theory is therefore relevant for gaining an understanding of child well-being as it focuses on how children interact with their environment (UNICEF, 2020a:6).

1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RATIONALE

Children's well-being has a significant influence on their present and future functioning and affects their ability to interact appropriately in their environment. If the well-being of children is negatively affected, it will hamper the achievement of their developmental tasks and their ability to effectively interact within their environment (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:812; Peeters, 2012:290). Children's well-being depends on their mental, cognitive, physical, spiritual, social, material, and environmental well-being (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014:1; Nahkur & Kutsar, 2019:355; Newland et al., 2019:395; Minkkinen, 2013:549).

The environment in which children grow and develop has a strong influence on their well-being. Their well-being is influenced by aspects such as children's family and socio-economic environments (Casas & Frønes, 2019:11-12; Mag, 2015:1394; Minkkinen, 2013:551; Nahkur & Kutsar, 2019:354). Many South African children live in environments that are harmful to their well-being, for example environments characterised by poverty, parental unemployment, poor housing, limited educational resources, family disintegration, food insecurity, crime and violence, and climate change (Department of Social Development, 2021:7; Hall, 2019a:223; Hall, 2019b:241; Patel, 2015:235; Proudlock, Hansungule, Westwood, Reynolds, Lloyd, Ncube, London, Makerf & Bertscherg, 2019:23; Republic of South Africa, 2012:18-22; Sambu, 2019:235). It must therefore be a political priority to enhance children's well-being, particularly of children living in poor socio-economic circumstances, to break the cycle of disadvantage (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:813). All children have the capacity to grow within their physical and social environment (Buck, Summers, Smith & Harwell, 2018:1252).

In the past, knowledge on child well-being has been mostly based on adult perspectives (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014:10; Buck et al., 2018:1254). Children's well-being has been studied mostly by gaining the perspectives of adults, often parents, rather than the perspectives of children (Brockeveld et al., 2019:590). Furthermore, although an increased focus on children's rights

and development has led to an increase in studies on child well-being, most of these studies were conducted in developed countries; therefore, the findings of these studies cannot be generalised to countries with different historical and cultural contexts (Camfield, Streuli & Woodhead, 2010:411). It is noted that children are in the best position to tell what well-being means to them and what their needs are as well-being is based on personal perspectives that are also socially and culturally constructed (Fattore & Mason, 2017:276-277; Mashford-Scott, Church & Tayler, 2012:235; Minkkinen, 2013:550).

The goal of this study was to explore the perspective of children in middle childhood on child well-being in a South African context. The study formed part of a group research project on the topic. The research findings might be used by social workers who deliver services to children and families. The social work profession aims to enhance the well-being of individuals, families, groups, and communities and on supporting people in their social environment to live positive lives (Patel, 2015:127; Peeters, 2012:2). Social workers play an important role in children's lives, especially those who are affected by social problems (Newland et al., 2019:397).

In South Africa, social work is based on a developmental approach. This approach means that social workers have a role of advocating for their clients, including acting as advocates for children's well-being and for sustainable development (Hawkins, 2010:69; Lombard & Viviers, 2014:83; Patel, 2015:127). The following research question was stated for the study: *"What are children's perspectives on child well-being as a pathway to sustainable futures within the South African context?"*

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.

The objectives of the study were as follows:

- To conceptualize 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

The goal of the study was to gather data on the perspectives that children have regarding their well-being. As children's subjective well-being is based on their personal views and influenced by their social and cultural context, the study was based on an interpretivist research paradigm (Nieuwenhuis, 2019a:67). The researcher explored and described children's perspectives on the topic, therefore qualitative research approach with a descriptive and exploratory purpose was followed (Fouché & Delport, 2011:64; Fouché & De Vos, 2011:95-96; Nieuwenhuis, 2019a:59; Neuman, 2014:38).

Applied research was relevant to the study, as the research findings could be used by social workers to develop interventions that are relevant to children's needs and that can contribute to sustainable futures for children (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:94; Rubin & Babbie, 2017:145). The researcher wished to gain an understanding of children's subjective well-being as a specific phenomenon. An instrumental case study design was therefore relevant to the study (Fouché & Schurink, 2011:322; Nieuwenhuis 2019b:90).

Children in South Africa who were between the ages of 8 and 12 years formed the study population (Bless, Higson-Smith & Sithole, 2013:164). The researcher conducted the study in Mbombela (Nelspruit) and White River in Mpumalanga, which was the target population for the study (Bless et al., 2013:164). The sample for the study was selected according to specific sampling criteria, therefore the non-probability sampling methods were used. Purposive sampling was utilized to select participants who complied with specific sampling criteria so that they would be able to provide answers relevant to the research question (Neuman, 2014:274; Strydom & Delport, 2011:392). As the researcher was not familiar with the study population, snowball sampling was used to access potential participants (Strydom & Delport, 2011:393). The final sample for the study consisted of 11 children (male and female) who complied with the sampling criteria.

Data were collected by means of semi-structured one-to-one interviews based on an interview schedule (Bless et al., 2013:197; Greeff, 2011:351-252). In addition, a set of visual communication cards were used after the questions in the interview schedule were completed. The cards served as further prompts to explore the research topic. A pilot study was conducted with two participants who complied with the sampling criteria (Bless et al., 2013:394). Due to the rich information collected, these two participants were included in the final sample of the study. The interviews were digitally recorded to accurately capture data, and informed consent and assent were given by the parents and the participants. The interviews were transcribed,

and the transcripts formed the basis for the data analysis, which was done according to thematic data analysis (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017:4). Measures were implemented to ensure data quality (Bless et al., 2013:236; Schurink et al., 2011:419; Nowell et al., 2017:3). The researcher adhered to research ethical principles that were relevant to the study (Strydom, 2011:114). A detailed description of the research methodology and ethical considerations will be presented in Chapter 3.

1.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The researcher views the following aspects as limitations to the study:

- The study was a quantitative, exploratory study that was conducted with a small sample of 11 participants. Therefore, the findings of the study cannot be generalized to the child population of South Africa.
- The study was conducted with children living in middle to high-income households, which implies that the research findings may not be relevant to children who live in low-income households.
- The research findings may not apply to children who live in rural areas, as the study was conducted in an urban area.
- The study was conducted with children between the ages of 8 and 12 years; therefore, excluding children from other ages and developmental stages. The research findings may thus not apply to children in other developmental stages.
- Most of the participants were from the White population and the research findings may not be relevant to other ethnic groups.

1.8 CONTENTS OF THE RESEARCH REPORT

The research report is presented in the following chapters:

Chapter 1: General introduction to the study

A general introduction to the study was presented in this chapter. An overview of the research topic was provided and the theoretical framework for the study was discussed. The problem statement and rationale were stated, followed by the goal and objectives of the study. A summary of the research methodology was presented, and the limitations of the study were indicated.

Chapter 2: Literature review on child well-being

The focus of this chapter is on a discussion of theory relevant to the research topic. Based on a literature review, the chapter contains a discussion on the literature on child well-being, factors that can influence children's well-being, and legislative frameworks that can support child well-being. An overview of child well-being in South Africa is provided, followed by the

potential role of social workers to enhance children's well-being. The chapter is concluded with a discussion of middle childhood as the developmental phase relevant to the study.

Chapter 3: Research methodology and empirical findings

The research methodology and ethical considerations for the study are described in this chapter, followed by the presentation of the empirical findings of the study.

Chapter 4: Key findings, conclusions and recommendations

In this last chapter of the research report, the key findings of the study are summarised and conclusions that follow from these findings are presented. Furthermore, recommendations for social work practice and for future research are presented.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW ON CHILD WELL-BEING

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The focus of the study was on children's perspectives on child well-being as a pathway to sustainable futures. The well-being of children can be assessed by using either a subjective approach or objective approach (Adams & Savahl, 2017:424). This study focused on the subjective well-being of children. Establishing children's perspectives on child well-being needs to be emphasized as children have knowledge about their lives. Opportunities need to be provided for children to comment on the perspectives of adults and the influence that adults have over children's lives (Fattore & Mason, 2017:277). Children's well-being is affected by the child's interaction with the environment and internal and external requirements of well-being (Minkkinen, 2013:548-549).

In the literature review, an overview of the concept of child well-being and indicators thereof will be provided. Factors that affect child well-being and legislative frameworks that can relate to children's well-being will be discussed. Furthermore, an overview of child well-being in the South African context and of the role of social workers as advocates for child well-being will be given. To conclude the literature review, the developmental characteristics of children in middle childhood will be discussed as the participants in the study were in this age group.

2.2 THE CONCEPT OF WELL-BEING

In the broadest sense, the term 'well-being' is an indication of the quality of people's lives (Brockeveld et al., 2019:589). Ben-Arieh, Casas, Frønes and Korbin (2014:1) refer to dictionary definitions of well-being as a "desirable state of being happy, healthy, or prosperous." The authors indicate that the concept will also include people's desires, self-fulfillment, and opportunities for personal development. Western and Tomaszewski (2016:1) note that well-being is considered a concept of an individual's capacity to live a fulfilling, creative and healthy life. The word 'well' means the state of any person's true happiness which provides a person with the meaning of life (Mag, 2015:1396).

Well-being is a basic human goal where all individuals have a wish for a life to go well (Huppert, 2014:1). A life that goes well consists of both functioning well and feeling good. Huppert (2014:1) further states that to feel good all the time would not be beneficial to a person's well-being as it undervalues the role of painful and negative emotions which is an important part of people's lives, for example when people react suitably to a situation such as showing anger or distress following injustice and sadness following misfortune. Well-being is thus also defined

in terms of the balance of negative and positive emotions and between pleasure and pain (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014:1; Huppert, 2014:1). Huppert (2014:1) explains that hedonic well-being, meaning emotional experiences, are only part of well-being since the emotions are fluid by nature, while well-being develops from sustainable experiences.

Well-being is described as a multidimensional construct (Lloyd & Emerson, 2017:593; Newland, Giger, Lawler, Roh, Brockevelt, & Schwenie, 2019:395). Well-being can be measured in different ways, most commonly by looking at social indicators such as poverty, the level of income, educational levels, mortality rates and subjective well-being (Brockevelt et al., 2019:589-590). The concept generally refers to people's quality of life and includes numerous dimensions that could possibly indicate a good or bad life (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014:1). Minkkinen (2013:547-548) confirm that many different dimensions or domains of well-being are indicated but note that "they lack consistency in their classification."

According to Ben-Arieh et al. (2014:1) well-being includes both objective and subjective aspects. Subjective well-being will include aspects such as feelings, autonomy and interpersonal relationships, and objective well-being will focus on aspects such as education, health, income and living conditions (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014:1; Lloyd & Emerson, 2017:593). Well-being is related to the quality of life of an individual in which objective indicators can include housing, health, education, household income and status, and subjective indicators will include life satisfaction and quality, people's perspective of happiness, social connection, and personal security (King, Renó & Novo, 2014:682-283; Statham & Chase, 2010:2). Well-being can have an impact on how individuals will evaluate personal outcomes that may take place in the present or in the future (De Neve, Diener, Tay & Xuereb, 2013:12). Furthermore, both subjective and objective measures are needed to determine a person's well-being (Casas & Frønes, 2019:2).

2.3 THE CONCEPT CHILD WELL-BEING

It is generally accepted that it is difficult to define child well-being and that various views on the concept exist (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:812). This section will focus on definitions and conceptions of child well-being.

2.3.1 Defining child well-being

Child well-being is described as a dynamic and holistic process, including interpersonal, intrapersonal, cultural and societal experiences, where the positive conditions in material, physical, social and mental situations more commonly exceed negative conditions (Minkkinen, 2013:549). Nahkur and Kutsar (2019:355) state that child well-being is considered a holistic concept that includes the emotional, physical, social, cognitive, environmental, and spiritual

well-being of children and is characterized by the absence of psychological or psychiatric problems. The well-being of children involves the child's cognitive, social, emotional, and psychological development; safety, physical health, educational achievements, and the behaviour of the child (Moore, 2013:3). From the different definitions, it is evident that children's well-being must be looked at holistically with inclusion of all the elements that it represents.

Raghavan and Alexander (2015 in Ayala Nunes et al., 2018:812) describe a child who is well can (a) obtain capabilities appropriate to his or her developmental stage that will prepare him or her to be successful as an adult, and (b) to interact in age-appropriate ways within his environment, for example being carefree, spontaneous and explore the environment. According to Mag (2015:1396), children who experience a state of well-being are happy, they are more energetic and able to socialize, show more cooperation and generosity, and enjoy the company of other people around them more. They will be more content, experience love, pride, and joy, and have self-confidence and better self-esteem. A state of well-being will encourage children and instill an eagerness to improve aspects of their lives including their mental and physical health. These benefits will not only be an advantage for the child but also for the child's family, school, community, and society (Mag, 2015:1396).

The well-being of children is dynamic, and it is important to evaluate well-being across all developmental stages as the achievements in one childhood stage form the basis for the next stage of development (Moore, 2013:6). Furthermore, perspectives on child well-being may vary in different contexts as the concept is culturally and socially determined (Mashford-Scott et al., 2012:235). It is agreed that the well-being of children has an impact on their present lives and influences their futures and development (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014:1). It is important to fully understand the factors that underline child well-being as developmental changes in the child and changes in society can have a significant effect on the state of children's well-being.

Minkkinen (2013:547) note the following challenge in finding a common definition of child well-being:

As a result of the diversity of approaches to the subject, not only is a consensus on the definition of child well-being hard to achieve for scientists, but the nature of well-being as a multidimensional phenomenon also makes it difficult to encapsulate in a brief theory.

The heterogeneity of the concept of child well-being relates to the diversity of children as individuals, the impact of difficulties and changes in their lives that occur regularly, and the way children function in the environment (Casas & Frønes, 2019:2). Child well-being is thus challenging to define and to be measured correctly, especially in terms of children growing up

in household environments and with families where their development is obstructed by various adverse circumstances (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:811). Children's well-being is more fragile than that of adults and involves more than good health and having a home; it also involves their education, social life, and the participation of children (Bagattini, 2019:211). To fully comprehend children's well-being, it must be understood through the dynamics between agency and the environment, and between abilities and opportunities that shape the child's life as well as determine the child's happiness. Child well-being is measured according to Buck et al. (2018:1254) by social cohesion, education, the connection to nature, security and safety, living standard, health and cultural fulfilment.

Minkkinen (2013:549) suggests that child well-being be conceptualised according to the following dimensions: physical, social, mental, and material well-being. Children's health, effective functioning on a physical level and the absence of any illness relate to children's *physical well-being* (Minkinen, 2013:550). Children's health and well-being need to be supported especially in the early childhood years for them to grow up and develop as adults that will positively contribute to society (Bammer, Michaux & Sanson, 2010:15). Minkkinen (2013:550) states that children's physical well-being influences other dimensions of their well-being, for example their mental well-being. Furthermore, disability and heredity can impact their physical well-being.

Social well-being relates to positive relationships and social interactions between the child and the people who are important to the child (Minkkinen, 2013:551). Buck et al. (2018:1254) refer to this dimension as the social cohesion domain that develops throughout childhood onto early adulthood. Relationships with parents and siblings form the foundation of social interactions of children and have an impact on their future behaviour and social interactions. Supportive relationships and positive friendships can enhance children's social well-being. Children's engagement with their family, peers, community, and school are evaluated according to five indicators that include their attitudes towards the community and others, social engagement, social support, school engagement, and family bonding (Buck et al., 2018:1254).

Mental well-being includes the cognitive and emotional well-being of the child and the absence of mental and psychiatric disorders (Minkkinen, 2013:550). It relates to positive mental states and the mental health of a person (Nahkur & Kutsar, 2019:354). Furthermore, children's mental well-being is the outcome of interactions within the immediate environment, with individuals and within the wider cultural and social context in which the individual is immersed (Nahkur & Kutsar, 2019:354). Mental well-being entails the child's thoughts with regards to life satisfaction and happiness about his or her circumstances, which relate to subjective well-being as it is the child's personal evaluation of his or her circumstances. About ten to twenty

percent of children and adults are influenced by mental health problems and the size of the problem can be much bigger when first discovered later in life (Nahkur & Kutsar, 2019:354. Lastly *material well-being* refers to a secure environment and the availability of materials that support the child's standard of living, including adequate nutrition and housing (Minkkinen, 2013:551).

Child well-being is a process and cannot be understood without the observation of this process (Casas & Frønes, 2019:11-12). Within the process involved in well-being, all aspects of the life situation of children such as socio-economic, psychological, and familial circumstances interplay with children's interpersonal attitudes such as social skills, cognitive development and personalities, in order to build psychological abilities and resources and meet the needs of children for appreciative relation with the world (Mag, 2015:1394). This interplay reflects the ecological systems theory which describes the influence of the environment on children's development (Berk, 2013:27).

It is important to understand the dimensions of child well-being because of rapid changes in society and changes in the child's development, which also highlights the importance of the perspectives of children (Moore, 2013:6). Well-being means that both subjective and objective well-being needs must be satisfied for individuals to achieve health in all life spheres (Naidoo & Muthukrishna, 2016:8).

2.3.2 Subjective well-being

An individual's sense of well-being depends on the individual's own perspective of the self, referring to subjective well-being (Minkkinen, 2013:550). Subjective well-being means the aspirations, evaluation, and perceptions that individuals have concerning their lives, and how they assess their lives (Fattore & Mason, 2017:278; Nadan & Kaye-Tzadok, 2019:462). Casas and Frønes (2019:4) state that subjective well-being means the evaluation of the quality of life. It refers to the evaluation of different domains of children's lives in terms of happiness, satisfaction, apprehensions and fears in the present as described by children. Subjective well-being highlights how individuals assess their lives in general and in specific life domains such as leisure time, family and friends (Casas, 2019:333).

Subjective well-being is a multifaceted concept that involves three main components, namely cognitive, psychological, and affective well-being (Casas & Frønes, 2019:5; Rees & Main, 2015:33). Savahl, Casas and Adams (2017:2) define subjective well-being as a widely defined concept that involves the affective and cognitive evaluation that children make about their lives, the events that have an impact on their lives, and the circumstances they are living in. Affective elements refer to negative and positive experiences, while cognitive elements refer to perspectives of domains and global satisfaction of life. When asking children about their

subjective well-being, they are asked to evaluate the areas with which they are pleased or happy, focusing on a wide range of aspects of their lives and their feelings towards their life (Savahl et al., 2017:2). Thus, subjective well-being includes both emotional states and cognitive evaluation (Ortuño-Sierraj, Bañuelos, Perez de Albeniz, Molina & Fonseca-Pedrero, 2019:1-2). It is important to follow a developmental perspective as well as an ecological perspective of macro-micro social confluences to understand both the development of children in different social, cultural and material context and the development of each child individually (Casas, 2019:333).

Furthermore, a holistic formulation of subjective well-being is necessary to understand children's functioning as effective beings to develop relevant intervention programmes to strengthen their well-being (Grass-Manos, Shimoni & Ben-Arieh, 2015:72). This means that child-centred programmes will be useful as predictors of the overall well-being and development of the child (Dinisman & Ben-Arieh, 2016:556). In subjective well-being studies, children reported on their level of happiness and life satisfaction on several life domains, such as the virtual world, the use of time, political voice, and social relations, amongst others (Casas & Frønes, 2019:4; McAuley, McKeown & Merriman, 2012:451; Nadan & Kaye-Tzadok, 2019; Rees & Main, 2015:12). The study of subjective well-being is in line with the UN Convention on The Rights of Children as it incorporates the perspectives of children and emphasize that children have a voice (United Nations General Assembly 1989) (Dinisman & Ben-Arieh, 2016:556).

According to Nadan and Kaye-Tzadok (2019:463) the subjective well-being of children can be understood with regards to the eight life domains, which are friends, family and home, school, neighbourhood, possessions and money, leisure time, the self and health. All these domains are interrelated, thus when one domain does not achieve the essential level to support the well-being of the child, the other domains will be influenced and lead to poor outcomes for the child (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014:6).

Until recently, the well-being of children and the data received was gathered from the perspective of adults (Adams, Savahl, Florence & Jackson, 2019:546). There was limited literature on the subjective well-being of children, and the state of children's lives has become a concern. However, professionals and the public started to focus more on gaining a picture of the well-being of children (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014 in Adams et al., 2019:546). Substantial attention was paid in recent years to subjective well-being and its involvement as a social indicator, with researchers placing their focus more on subjective well-being instead of focusing on adult-centred perspectives of child-centred issues (Kaye-Tzadok et al., 2019:345).

According to research studies, subjective well-being can be considered as a protective factor for health, as it promotes longevity and reduces the risk for chronic physical illness (Steptoe, Deaton & Stone, 2015:641). Even though high levels of subjective well-being serve to assist individuals to function better, it is not a cure or instant solution. Happy people do lose friends and spouses, they do get sick, and not all happy people are productive workers, but happiness aids functioning and health. Many other factors such as social capital, intelligence and personality are important for individuals to function satisfactorily (De Neve et al., 2013:18- 19). Individuals with high levels of subjective well-being have attributional styles that are more empowering and self-enhancing (Huppert, 2014:27). Positive attributional styles involve self-esteem and optimism, pursuit of goals and motivation, all of which promote overall subjective well-being. Huppert (2014:27) provides an example that subjective well-being is improved when a sense of progress towards estimated goals is observed, motivation towards achieving goals exists, and the pursuit of goals is consistent with personal values.

Ben-Arieh et al. (2014:1) conclude that when assessing children's well-being, their subjective perceptions with regards to their well-being must be taken into consideration together with providing resources to them. More studies and information are needed on children's perspectives on their own well-being. More often children's well-being is judged and explained by researchers, adults, parents and policy makers without children been provided with the opportunity to take part in studies and in discussions on their well-being (Graf & Schweiger, 2015:3). Therefore, it is crucial to hear the perspectives that children have on what they consider as required for their well-being. A shift has occurred in child studies, with the focus placed more on exploring the views, voices, and opinions of children, which differs from earlier studies that were more adult-informed. This shift made it possible to encourage child informed studies on the subjective well-being of children (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014:13; Casas & Frønes, 2019:10). It is however important to remember that the voices of children cannot be valued without children being present (Mag, 2015:1391).

2.3.3 Objective well-being

Objective well-being includes indicators that are achieved from information and statistics by experts, and some objective well-being measures involve educational levels, economic aspects, and health (Casas & Frønes, 2019:3). Another way objective well-being can be understood is by focusing on measurable elements and observable aspects of well-being such as academic performance (Statham & Chase, 2010:5; Omar & Abu Bakar Ah, 2017:8). Objective well-being emphasizes opportunities for enhancing children's well-being, the capacity of children to utilize those opportunities, and their freedom to access opportunities

(Casas & Frønes, 2019:3). Furthermore, objective well-being provides information to understand if services are provided adequately and if needs are satisfied.

In measuring objective well-being, the focus is on satisfaction accounts or objective lists (Tinkler & Hicks, 2011:4). Objective life accounts include the satisfaction of basic needs of humans and their rights, as it is a prerequisite for individuals to live well and flourish. The perceptions of individuals are not considered during objective measures, as individual perceptions are related to understanding the well-being of an individual as the only person who knows how the person is feeling (Tinkler & Hicks, 2011:4).

The objective approach views well-being as indicators of the quality of life, such as social attributes (health, education, connections) and material resources (food, housing, income) (Western & Tomaszewski, 2016:2). According to Huppert (2014:2), objective well-being implies well-being at the societal level, meaning the objective reality of people's lives. The difference between objective and subjective well-being is mentioned by Casas (2019:334) as objective indicators referring to expert evaluations and subjective indicators referring to the opinion of citizens. The subjective approach suggests that objective circumstances and goods affect subjective life satisfaction (Western & Tomaszewski, 2016:2).

In some objective measurements of well-being, the evaluation of subjective well-being forms one element of the objective measures of overall well-being, namely in terms of the objective approach's core question which asks participants 'to agree on the checklist of goods that are required for a good life' (Western & Tomaszewski, 2016:2). Children's evaluations, perceptions and aspirations should be considered as important for understanding social dynamics. Children are active members of society and their own perceptions and evaluation of what they consider as child well-being need to be considered (Casas, 2019:334). Contrary to objective measures of child well-being, research on subjective well-being is interested in children's own perception and experiences of their world. Therefore, the information collected will be on subjective well-being (Adams & Savahl, 2017:424).

2.4. INDICATORS OF CHILD WELL-BEING

Social work practice follows an ecological approach that is concerned with a person-in-environment approach to human functioning within the broader social, cultural, political and economic contexts. More recently, the environment became included to broaden an understanding person in the environment (Miller, Hayward & Shaw, 2012:271-272). Sustainable development is measured according to three dimensions of well-being: social, economic, and environmental well-being (Rodríguez-Rosa, Gallego-Álvarez, Vicente-Galindo & Galindo-Villardón, 2017:548). The social work profession is committed to meeting these three dimensions of sustainable development (Lombard, 2019:54).

2.4.1 Social indicators

Social well-being means the support and interaction that individuals have in their lives. Social well-being includes the supportive and positive relationships between the child and his friends, family, parents and teachers (Buck et al., 2018:1254; Minkinnen, 2013:551). According to Rahdarzadeh and Adibisedeh (2016:194), support is a significant aspect of social well-being, and has been found to directly link to a person's social well-being. In addition, people's social well-being is related to the satisfaction of their basic needs, which include aspects such as sufficient nutrition, health, education, sanitation, and equality (Lombard, 2015:54; Rodríguez-Rosa et al., 2017:548; Ten Bruggencate et al., 2019:1826). Health indicators include the physical and mental health states as well as the behaviour that leads to health risks (Buck et al., 2018:1261). When people's basic needs are not met, they are at higher risk of developing physical and mental problems (Ten Bruggencate et al., 2019:1826).

2.4.2 Economic indicators

Child well-being can also be measured by concentrating on economic or material indicators. Economic indicators of well-being according to Lombard (2015:54) and Rodríguez-Rosa et al. (2017:548) include a person's employment, the ability to earn an income or make a living as well as the gross domestic product (GDP) and public debt of a country. In terms of child well-being, Minkinen (2013:551) states that material well-being includes sufficient housing, nutrition and other materials which will determine children's standard of living. Poverty is therefore a factor that has a negative influence on children's well-being. In South Africa, many children live in poverty and many households are living in conditions characterised by low income, unemployment, and limited access to educational resources (Casas, 2011:569; Conti & Heckman, 2012:5; Statistics South Africa, 2018). The well-being of children is considered critical for the economic and social frameworks of a flourishing and healthy society (Mag, 2015:1394). The welfare of every child is parents' legal responsibility, and the government, teachers and parents need to show commitment to promote the well-being of children (Mag, 2015:1394). This commitment is important as the experience of children in the global context and the influence of drastic changes in society may heighten anxiety levels and doubt about the future.

Children's living standard is related to four indicators, namely the school, basic needs, wealth, and income (Buck et al., 2018:1257). Taking all the above into account, researchers should focus on the economic influences on different child well-being aspects. These aspects include child development, child health, the investment done by the parents, inter-generational transmission, parents' socioeconomic status, the success of adults in the family, early life situations or events, and the family background (Conti & Heckman, 2012:11).

2.4.3 Environmental indicators

A noteworthy shift has been recently noticed in studies on the well-being of children with thought given to the natural environment of children and the time they spend in the environment (Adams, Savahl, Florence & Jackson, 2019:547; Buck et al., 2018:1263; David & Weinstein, 2013:4; Miller et al., 2012:271-272). Adams and Savahl (2017:425-426) mention that various studies have proven that the interaction that children have in the environment improves their purpose in and quality of life, their well-being and life satisfaction. People who live in poor socioeconomic conditions are at risk of experiencing negative environmental conditions as they are more likely to experience natural disasters (Alston, 2015:357). Section 24 in the Bill of Rights of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA, 1996) states that every individual has the right “to an environment that is not harmful to their health or well-being.” From a social work perspective, Lombard (2019:54) describes the concept of environmental justice which refers to people’s right to live in an environment that is clean, safe and healthy.

According to Adams et al. (2019:545) natural spaces are considered the places that children favour the most. It is therefore important to provide children with access to safe natural spaces and a healthy environment in their community. A child’s sense of place is strongly correlated to the child’s well-being (Buck et al., 2018:1263). However, a lack of safety will negatively influence the connection children make with a place and limit their ability to make connections with other places. Experiencing safety and security is therefore important in terms of the connections of the child with his or her physical surroundings and community. Buck et al. (2018:1264) explain that leisure time plays an important role in the mental and physical well-being of children as it provides them with opportunities to exercise and spend time with their family and friends.

Adams et al. (2019) conducted a study on the meaning that children assign to natural spaces and the environment and the influence it has on children’s subjective well-being. Their research findings show that children find nature to be very important to their well-being and wish that it should be incorporated into children’s neighbourhoods. Child friendly cities (CFCs) should include safe natural and public spaces as an unsafe environment “essentially restricts their play, ability to socialise with peers, mobility, and influences their overall sense of contentment with their neighbourhoods” (Adams et al., 2019:560).

The environment and the context which children are living in have an impact on their subjective well-being (Adams et al., 2019:547). Environmental well-being is one of the measurements of human well-being (Coompton & Hoffman, 2013:51; Fattore & Mason, 2017:276; Savahl et al., 2017:31; Miller et al., 2012:23). The quality of the environment is one of the aspects in the

holistic concept of child well-being (Buck et al., 2018:1263; Nahkur & Kutsar, 2019:355). A clean and inviting environment enhances people's opportunities to live in a safe and comfortable environment, and positively influences their emotional state as it leads to people being more cheerful and happy (Byrd, 2020).

Being exposed to a dirty environment causes people to become sick and causes life-threatening illnesses such as diarrhoea which can lead to death (Byrd, 2020). Every child has the right to develop to his or her full potential in an environment which provides the child with safety, well-being, and health (Yufiarti, Edwita & Suharti, 2019:342). Children, family members, teachers, parents and caregivers can provide help to keep the environment clean by acts such as using clean water, throwing away rubbish in a designated place, and using less plastic (Yufiarti, 2019:342, 345). Services and infrastructure can contribute to clean environments, for example by providing facilities for washing hands and providing dustbins which people can effortlessly access to throw away rubbish (Yufiarti, 2019:345). Children have the right to participate in the matters that influence them, for example the natural environment and effects of climate change (Lombard & Viviers, 2014:84). Children's participation is important for building sustainable futures and practices that do not acknowledge and accept children's rights to be heard, must be challenged (Manyena, Fordham & Collins, 2008:313).

2.5 FACTORS THAT AFFECT CHILD WELL-BEING

Children's well-being is affected by risk and protective factors in the environments in which they live.

2.5.1 Protective factors of child well-being

Protective factors are characteristics that decrease the possibility of negative outcomes in the face of adversity. Positive factors that can be protective include a healthy, supportive, and stable home environment for the child with positive and safe relationships between family and friends (Fattore & Mason, 2017:278-279). A community characterised by respect, trust and friendship bonds between families provides a sense of belonging to children (Fattore & Mason, 2017:278-279). The probability of achieving positive outcomes for children is increased by the factors as mentioned (Greene & Greene, 2009:1013). Children are affected by and dependent on what is happening in the different environmental systems, therefore, aspects such as service delivery, education, family systems and policies make a significant difference to the well-being of children. This section contains an overview of some protective factors related to children's well-being.

2.5.1.1 A positive home environment and family relationships

Conducive family conditions influence the well-being of children in a positive way and add to the development of children's prosocial skills (Rees & Main, 2015:65). When the family atmosphere is pleasant and healthy, children will experience peace, happiness, and comfort (Sirkandi, 2020:340).

Children depend on and learn from their parents. Parents who protect and care for children, create a path that improves children's well-being (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2016:15). Children need their parents to nurture, cherish and act in the best interest of the child by supporting and guiding them (Sirkandi, 2020:340). Newland (2014:1339-1340) states that parental health is very important to the well-being of children as their well-being influences the entire family system's functioning. Parents, usually the biological mother and father of the child, educate children from birth to early adulthood (Sirkandi, 2020:339).

Gežová (2015:46) proposes that a child needs both parents, a mother and father, to develop optimally as the role of mother and father is not comparable. Children need both parents due to gender differences and the mental characteristics of men and women which will influence parenting (Gežová, 2015:47). In many families, mothers are seen as the primary caregivers that have an impact on children's well-being as they are the symbol of love, tenderness, and care (Gežová, 2015:50). The teamwork between a mother and father, between a husband and wife is needed to fully understand family relationships (Sirkandi, 2020:340). Children raised by a single parent may thus develop personal problems (Gežová, 2015:47).

Brothers and sisters play an essential role in the child's development (Szymańska, 2020). The relationships between siblings demonstrate some hierarchical characteristics in which older brothers and sisters become a role model, teacher, or caretaker to the younger siblings (Hou et al., 2022:2). The relationships between siblings are both supportive, such as siblings representing the role of a teacher and caregiver, and reciprocal, such as siblings who play together and siblings who have conflict. Interactions between siblings provide children with the opportunity to learn about the perspectives of others and how to interact with the social world (Hou et al., 2022:2). Siblings' relationships with each other result in positive interactions characterized by warmth, closeness, intimacy, affection and companionship as well as negative interactions with conflict, fighting, hostility and aggression (Hou et al., 2022:2; Louw & Louw, 2014a:272). The positive interactions between siblings consist of behaviours such as sharing, aiding, comforting, social pretend play and time responses between siblings (Hou et al., 2022:2). Siblings' sense of self, social skills, self-competence and self-control enhance when siblings spend time, play, experience difficult situations and

learn together, along with the emotional skills which develop when siblings observe the reactions of other siblings (Szymańska, 2020).

The family structure consisting of a mother, father and their biological or adopted children refers to the nuclear family (Department of Social Development, 2021:v). However, children nowadays live in diverse family types. In South Africa the family structure involves, amongst others, female-headed households, single parent households, child-headed households, polygamous marriages, grandparents as primary caregivers, same-sex marriages, and extended kingship households. The extended family is defined as a “multigenerational family” that consists of children who may or may not share a household with an uncle, aunt, grandparents and other relatives such as a niece or nephew (Department of Social Development, 2021:iv).

The extended family entails the essential relationships among family members to motivate and support other family members and encourage their resilience (Walsh, 2012 in Jansen, 2017:9). Extended family members often contribute to the material needs of a household through the exchange of resources such as food, money, and transportation, by helping to take care of children and advising parents regarding how to raise a child, or by taking on the role of co-parent in the absence of parents (Cross, 2018:2). Furthermore, children can learn by observing the behaviour of family members (Ackerman et al., 2013 in Jansen, 2017:1). Fattore and Mason (2017:278-279) further mention that members of the extended family are essential systems in children’s lives as these support systems contribute to a sense of happiness, care, belonging and trust in the child. Therefore, family strengthening programmes to empower families should also include extended family members (The Department of Social Development, 2021:29).

Grandparents form an important part of family life for many children. Studies demonstrate that a high level of grandparents’ engagement plays in an important role in the well-being of children (Holdgaard, 2021:1). Grandparents take on different roles in helping parents, such as taking care of children when sick or during school holidays or when both parents work full-time and picking up children from school (Holdgaard, 2021:6). When grandparents and grandchildren have a good relationship with each other, and they are close to each other, several benefits emerge. The benefits include being role models for their grandchildren; teaching their values, traditions and knowledge to their grandchildren; motivating academic or other successes; providing advice and emotional support; helping grandchildren with homework; and discussing appropriate behaviour (Dunifon & Bajracharya, 2012:5; Holdgaard, 2021:1). Grandparents who play the role as primary caregivers of their grandchildren have been found to face challenges, for example, limited finances and poor health which, according to the White Paper on Families in South Africa (Department of

Social Development, 2013b:20), can lead to socio-emotional issues for children.

2.5.1.2 The importance of pets

Animals are seen by many as part of the family members and play an important role in people's lives. Animals provide companionship, entertainment, and the chance for children to learn responsibility (Severson, 2014:26, 28). When growing up with pets in the home, children show an interest in participating directly in caring for pets such as talking to, feeding, and grooming pets (Born, 2018:48). The most common behaviour of children is talking to animals. When children talk to animals it shows a desire to communicate. To interact with friendly pets can help children with various physical and mental problems as the level of the feel-good chemicals serotonin and dopamine increase in a child's brain when playing with pets (Biswas, 2019:1). Pets are experienced as honest, consistent, accepting, and affectionate, and whenever a child feels lonely and without support, a pet can help in decreasing the experience of loneliness (Biswas, 2019:1). When a child has a pet, he or she will never feel alone and, in addition, will learn responsibility by taking care of and looking after the pet (Biswas, 2019:2).

Positive psychology indicates that individuals increase their self-esteem when taking ownership for taking care of pets as a specific job or task. When accomplished, they strengthen views of themselves as being capable of taking care of a living being other than themselves; thereby developing a sense of motivation and purpose which helps to enhance well-being, self-esteem and mental health (Biswas, 2019:002). Children in middle childhood feel positive when they participate in meaningful activities such as the tasks mentioned above (Martorell et al., 2014:395; Thomas, 2005:93).

Physical activity such as playing and walking with pets have various benefits for the child's physical and mental health and well-being. Children who make time to walk their pet improve their own fitness that aids further development of relaxation and mindfulness. Pets can be a source of comfort to children as they provide children with unlimited love (Biswas, 2019:002). Taking care of a furry friend offers a child immense joy, and the love and the presence of a pet at home can provide a sense of security for a child. Furthermore, having pets enhance the social and mental well-being of children, which refers to positive relationships and emotional states (Minkkinen, 2013:551; Nahkur & Kutsar, 2019:354).

2.5.1.3 Educational opportunities and support of a teacher

A child's educational achievement is one of the aspects of child well-being and is one of the ways in which children's well-being is measured (Brockeveld et al., 2019:589-590; Moore, 2013:3). Schools and school education thus play an important part in children's well-being.

Children's education is a main facet of their welfare (Mag, 2015:1392). School is the place where the child spends most of his time away from home. Children's social connections include their group of friends that is formed at their schools and children who are more engaged in their school tend to show higher school performance, health, well-being, and development (Buck et al., 2018:1255-1256).

A teacher plays a fundamental role in the lives of children and provides children with the knowledge and skills they need for a successful life and career (Clement & Rencewigg, 2020:365). To assure the well-being of a child, every teacher or parent of a child needs to focus on the child as a whole and interact and communicate according to the child's needs. People can start to understand the child's world by listening to children, including their emotions and feelings, and by developing positive relationships with them (Mag, 2015:1392). For a long time, children have been silenced, underestimated, and not involved; however, policies are focusing more on respecting the needs and rights of all children (Mag, 2015:1392).

Successful teaching includes the teacher's knowledge on different subjects; the behaviour of the teacher such as warmth, and the teacher's beliefs (Clement & Rencewigg, 2020:365). According to research studies, the most acceptable aspects of a good teacher are good communication skills, knowledge on subjects, and enthusiasm. The teacher needs to communicate and interact with the child according to the needs of the child, focus on the child holistically, and show dedication so that children's well-being can be supported (Mag, 2015:1394). A sensitive and supportive teacher deliberately notices the child's signals and promptly and efficiently acts to the needs of the child (Singer, Nederend, Penninx, Tajika & Boom, 2013:3). Children expect a teacher to be innovative, patient, professional and confident, to have knowledge about various teaching methods and subjects, and to have a sense of humour (Clement & Rencewigg, 2020:365). Negative characteristics of a teacher is considered as being arrogant, aggressive, and short-tempered (Clement & Rencewigg, 2020:365).

2.5.1.4 Friendships and the support of friends

The association between children's well-being and friendship is crucial (Holder & Coleman, 2015:81). Friends do not only provide children with friendship for play and recreation, but also play an important role in the optimal development and emotional well-being of the child (Rogers, 2012:487). Friendships lead to social and cognitive benefits that provide support during the different changes and adjustments that children must master in life (Hartup 1996 in Rogers, 2012:487). Carter and Nutbrown (2016:2) state that pre-school children perceive their friendships and friends as understanding and sharing interest and ideas, affection, and mutual support. As they grow, they start to focus more on aspects of intimacy and loyalty, which

include a friend to talk with. Children's opportunity to maintain and create friendships often occurs when they participate in team sport, which contributes to their well-being (Holder & Coleman, 2015:89).

Children who enjoy good friendships experience various advantages, such as coping better with stress, a lower prevalence of being rejected by peers, and having higher self-esteem and lower levels of depression and loneliness (Holder & Coleman, 2015:81). In middle childhood, friendships and friends help the child to overcome aspects such as shyness, loneliness and anxiety (Rogers, 2012:487). When having few friends and weak peer relations, children are more likely to have difficulty in experiencing social status, competence, and mental health as an adult (Holder & Coleman, 2015:81). According to Minkkinen (2013:551), the long-term impact of friendships can affect the current and future life experience of the individual regarding the person's mental well-being.

2.5.1.5 Meeting children's basic needs

Children's objective well-being is indicated by their quality of life, which include material resources to have their basic needs met (Huppert, 2014:2; Tinkler & Hicks, 2011:4; Western & Tomaszewski, 2016:2). Children's well-being depends on their basic needs being met and when this does not happen, they are likely to experience physical and mental problems (Ten Bruggencate et al., 2019:1826).

Having a *suitable home or shelter* is a basic need and can contribute to children's well-being in different ways. Children spend most of their time at their home, and unsuitable housing conditions can lead to poor health for the child (Chatindiara, Marais & Cloete, 2022:3). To meet the basic needs of children, as highlighted by the White Paper on Families in South Africa, a family needs to provide children and other family members living in the household, with a sense of belonging which includes nurturing (Department of Social Development, 2013b:6). Children should experience security and a feeling of being safe in their homes. A home is the place where family members feel safe and comfortable to talk to each other and allows a child to form connections with family members and experience a sense of belonging which is needed by the child (Randolph, 2021). A home filled with love and laughter helps children to experience positive emotions and help family members to sleep better (Randolph, 2021). Families come together at their home and break free from all the concerns they experience outside their home.

Furthermore, children's basic needs include proper *nutrition, clothing, and sanitation* (Rodríguez-Rosa et al., 2017:548; Ten Bruggencate et al., 2019:1826; Western & Tomaszewski, 2016:2). Meeting children's needs links with the material well-being of children (Minkkinen, 2013:551) as well as to their health and physical well-being. It is important

to support children's health and physical well-being for their optimal development into adulthood (Bammer et al., 2010:15). Children's physical well-being is important for them to experience mental well-being (Minkinen, 2013:550).

Clothes were first worn as safety and defence against components such as insects, enemies, strengths, harm and beasts (Ofori, Adu, Nyame-Tawiah, Adu-Akwaboa & Agbovie, 2014:33). In current times, clothes protect people against cold, rain, heat and other climate conditions and make them feel more comfortable at home and in society (Sahoo, 2018:2, 4). For children, school uniforms are associated with pride, a sense of belonging, and identity within the community and, in addition, decrease competitive dressing and create a learning environment that is more equitable (Reidy, 2021:13; Spencer, 2013). However, school uniforms have disadvantages for some children. According to Reidy (2021:13), groups such as the poor who could benefit from the equitable environment that school uniforms support, may not be able to afford the school uniforms. This aspect must be taken into account as it can either lower or enhance well-being, as many South African children live in poverty and experience the inequality between the poor and rich (Rees & Main, 2013:30; SAHRC & UNICEF, 2016:5).

Having access to books can enhance mental and cognitive aspects of well-being (Brockevelt et al., 2019:589; Minkinen, 2013:4-5; Nahkur & Kutsar, 2019:354). Books teach children different concepts, values, general knowledge, and facts which they can apply to real-life situations (Strouse, Nyhout & Ganea, 2018:1-2). By learning, children recognize and recite information that is demonstrated in a book and transfer this information to a new context beyond such learning. Certain characteristics in picture books, for example the presentation of the content, can stimulate learning and the transfer of educational context to real-world situations (Strouse et al., 2018:4). Reading books furthermore expose children to rich language (Strouse, 2018:4). Joint reading has been associated with early literacy skills, a growth in children's vocabulary and knowledge, and awareness of different emotions. Reading for pleasure supports children's cognitive, educational, and social development and the child's well-being and health (Collier, 2019). Hall (2019b:241) highlights that poverty influence the ability of parents to afford educational materials such as books for children, which can have an influence on the child's developmental and educational results.

Having toys in the home can enhance children's development and well-being in different ways. Toys such as blocks and puzzles can enhance children's fine motor skills, toys such as card games can enhance their language, riding a bicycle can enhance gross motor skills; and artistic and symbolic play such as playing with clay or dough, dolls and toy cars can enhance their mental skills (Yazgin, 2021:221). By playing with toys, children receive the opportunity to

imagine, learn and create, to adjust to the world of adults and to recognize their own strengths (Yazgin, 2021:215, 217). Play is how children learn about themselves, others, and the world, how they build their imagination and creativity, and gain behavioural and emotional benefits, independence, and physical fitness. Thus, the mental, physical, and emotional health of the child are positively influenced through play (Blahey, 2021).

In modern times, electronic devices such as computers and mobile phones play an increasing role in children's lives. Some positive influences of using electronic devices relate to access to information and resources that assist the child to learn about various topics, teach the child to select information, foster new learning skills, and enhance critical thinking (Charles Nechtem Associates, 2021). Electronic devices can be used to stay connected and communicate with friends and family who live far from the child (Charles Nechtem Associates, 2021). However, the use of electronic devices can also negatively influence children. The social well-being of children can be negatively influenced, for example by limiting direct interpersonal interactions; their mental well-being which includes their cognitive functioning and emotions can be affected; and lower levels of physical activity can affect their physical well-being (Minkkinen, 2013:550-551; Nahkur & Kutsar, 2019:354). Technology can have a negative impact on the relationship, social skills, physical activity, concentration, and physical health of children, lead to obsessive and addictive behaviours, and expose them to dangerous strangers and inappropriate and sexual content (Charles Nechtem Associates, 2021; Mustafaogly, Zirek, Yasaci & Ozdinder, 2018:240-241). Research studies have found that using electronic devices too frequently may be harmful, as it replaces physical activity, disturbs sleep patterns, and limits reading and interaction with parents which benefit the child's development (Morgan, Wang & Woods, 2021:711-712). Therefore, parents must establish rules for digitally based activities and for watching television.

2.5.1.6 A safe neighbourhood and play areas

According to Norris, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, Wyche and Pfefferbaum (2008:145) culture and communities serve as protective factors in any event of adversity. Culture means the way a certain group of the community or people conduct themselves according to the cultural norms in a specific society (Idang, 2015:98-99; Papazoglou, 2019:2625). For children's well-being, culture does matter as the way in which society and communities function influences the current potential of children and their development as future members of society. Cultural factors can thus support the well-being of children in their communities.

A difference can be made to the well-being of children when their communities and neighbourhoods are safe and have the necessary facilities, for instance, having a park for children to play. Individuals, especially children, play because it is fun (Goldstein, 2012:3).

Playing at a playground or park is healthy in many ways for a child as it leads to positive emotions which enhance long-term health (Goldstein, 2012:3). Play enhances children's quality of life and with appropriate play materials and play spaces, the child is provided with the opportunity to obtain the best chance to become healthy, happy and active (Goldstein, 2012:5). Children benefit physically when playing on a playground, which positively impacts their emotions, decreases stress, and improves their balance, flexibility, coordination, and fine and gross motor skills (Goldstein, 2012:6). Outdoor play thus benefits children's mental and physical well-being (Minkinen, 2013:550-551). A diverse and rich environment supports the development and learning of children. Children explore and learn in a secure and safe environment when playing outdoors, which enhances all the developmental domains of the child's (Undiyaundeye, 2017:14).

Sport facilities where children can safely participate in sport can enhance the well-being of children. Sport includes any form of physical activity in which children engage according to instruction and a set of rules that guide them (Angba, 2022:1). The participation of children in sport involves physical activity and movement that result in the improvement of motor skills, overall health and fitness, and their social and cognitive functioning (Angba, 2022:2-3). Sport provides the child with the chance to develop and maintain friendships and contributes to the well-being of the child (Holder & Coleman, 2015:89). Participation in sport and exercise promotes a sense of well-being by reducing stress, enhancing sleep and memory, and supporting a positive view of the self (Angba, 2022:3, 5).

The secondary advantages of sport include benefits to the psychosocial and personal development of the person (Malm, Jakobsson, & Isaksson, 2019:1). In general, people participating in sport have greater health than people who do not participate in any sport (Malm et al., 2019:5). Eime, Young, Harvey, Charity and Payne (2013:19) conclude in their systematic review of research that there is significant evidence of different social and psychological health benefits when adults and children participate in sport. These benefits include enhanced resilience, emotional regulation and positive affect, and lower emotional distress and depressive symptoms. The social advantages of participation in sport include better social skills, cooperation, and social well-being and a decrease in social anxiety (Eime et al., 2013:14). Sport can enhance different domains of well-being, such as the emotional, social, and physical well-being (Minkinen, 2013:550-551).

2.5.1.8 Community resources and services

Children's well-being can be enhanced when there are adequate resources and service delivery in their communities. Examples of resources and services include healthcare services, churches, shops and security services, and the availability of transport and

electricity. Children see nurses and doctors as people who take care of them but may also at times be scared of going to the doctor as they have the image of the doctor and nurses injecting them (Ghosh, Afroze, Khanam, Sultana & Choundhury, 2020:62-63). Doctors need to talk to and interact with patients, diagnose medical problems, and effectively treat illnesses and injuries (Indeed Editorial Team, 2022). A hospital or medical facility needs to be well-furnished, clean, organised, and comfortable to provide cohesive care and to reduce the detrimental impact of illness and injuries on children and families (Ghosh et al., 2020:63). Proudlock and Rohrs (2018:14-15) state that the government of South Africa must provide access to sufficient health care services to children and their families and ensure that poor service delivery is rectified.

Community services to ensure children's safety are important for children's well-being. According to Van Niekerk and Mathews (2019:117), children, especially young children in South Africa are at risk to be injured at home as they are eager to explore their environment. These injuries often include fires and burns. The government must provide firefighting services to protect the lives of people as well as properties against fire outbreaks. It is crucial for firefighter services to act quickly to put out fires, rescue people and prevent further harm (Ayoosu & Lim, 2019:552). The services that firefighters provide to people include protecting the lives of people by responding quickly to extinguish fires, and by providing first aid and emergency transport for injured persons (Faro, 2022).

A church provides people with the chance to participate in activities such as singing, praying, sharing food, laughing, listening, confiding, and celebrating (Jenkins, 2022). A church service teaches and uplifts people and enhances the lives of people and their spirituality in order to live a better life (ComeuntoChrist, 2022). Minkinnen (2013:4-5) highlights that religion is important to support the mental well-being of a child. When going to church, people experience a sense of belonging to a community where people support and socialize with each other (ComeuntoChrist, 2022). The findings of a study by Chen and VanderWeele (2018:9) on religious upbringings and the well-being and health of adolescents, confirmed that of previous studies on the benefits of the involvement of adolescents in religion. Their research indicated that engagement in religious activities provided adolescents with peer support and promoted active coping skills and prosocial behaviour.

Shops, including stores that sell food and a variety of products, provide people with the everyday products that support the needs of people and help the functioning of society, which is needed to enhance the well-being of individuals (Farmer, 2019). Items ranging from expensive and specialised products to inexpensive products and products for everyday use are available in shops (Indeed Editorial Team, 2021). In South Africa, goods are sold in formal

centres and shops as well as by informal traders, which give people in the community access to a variety of food and other products (Horwood, Haskins, Alferts, Masango-Musindutsi, Dobsin & Rollins, 2019:2).

Access to facilities such as transport and electricity enable people to live a better life. The benefits of having access to transport such as a private car provide people with the opportunity to visit places and family members can experience some privacy, safety and comfort when travelling (Anwar, 2012:73). A lack of access to transportation or a private car could negatively influence the well-being of the family. For example, single mothers with young children or members of families living in a low-income households may be forced to walk through poorly kept or dangerous areas, and children from poor households spend more of their time walking to places (Mackett & Thoreau, 2015:5, 8-9). Hall and Richter (2018:22) note that the lack of transport makes it difficult for families to raise children effectively; therefore, the state needs to provide effective public services to all people.

People use electricity to perform various functions every day for lighting and heating and operating electrical appliances (The scientific world, 2020). Electricity allows individuals to conveniently cook food, heat water, wash clothes, use the bathroom, and use appliances and technology for cleaning and entertainment (Day, 2018; The scientific world, 2020). Without electricity, people will not be able to complete tasks that are important for them to live well. Electricity is also needed by medical facilities, retail facilities and schools to run sufficiently (Day, 2018). In 2018, the civil society and government bodies suggested access to electricity for breaking the “intergenerational pattern of risks” that many vulnerable children in South Africa experience (Proudlock & Rohrs, 2018:14). Sustainable futures for children can be linked to this goal, which involves enhancing human dignity, equality and social inclusion, and mitigating poverty to improve children’s well-being (Global Education Monitoring Report, 2016; Savahl et al., 2017:39).

The availability of community resources and services that can enhance children’s well-being supports an ecological perspective that emphasises the role of children’s wider environment in their development (Berk, 2013:26; Louw et al., 2014:29). It also links to child well-being as a multidimensional concept with various dimensions that could affect children’s quality of life (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014:1; Minkkinen, 2013:547-548).

2.5.1.8 Childhood resilience

Resilience is the process in which of various biological, psychological, social, and ecological systems interact in specific ways to help people to improve, sustain and regain mental well-being when they experience challenges or risks (Ungar & Theron, 2020:441). Resilience refers to the ability to meet one’s developmental tasks despite threats that occur and is regarded as

a pattern that develops over time that is distinguished by positive adaptation despite acute or chronic adversities, risks, and stressors (Greene & Greene, 2009:1014). Every child can acquire resilience; however, it is important that every child is given the opportunity to enhance his or her resilience (Beyond Blue Ltd., 2017:48).

According to Louw and Louw (2014b:430) resilience is the capacity of individuals to recover and handle challenging situations effectively and to improve their optimal functioning and well-being. Resilience can enhance children's well-being in different ways that improve protective factors and decrease risk factors (Seymour, 2014:226). Resilience is linked to personal, internal, and external processes as well as environmental factors and closes the gap between macro and micro elements. Therefore, interventions at micro and macro levels can enhance resilience, decrease the impact of adversity, and promote successful adaptation and recovery (Greene & Greene, 2009:1011).

To enhance resilience, the strengths of families, communities and children need to be developed for them to be able to manage problems and difficult situations on their own and to master adversities (Cherry, 2020:2). To enhance resilience in children, they need to be empowered by helping them to develop skills to deal with adversities, to develop their self-efficacy and self-esteem and to form positive interpersonal relationships in the family, peer group and school (Beyond Blue Ltd., 2017:10; Louw & Louw, 2014b:432-433; Naidoo & Muthukrishna, 2016:6). Despite the negative factors that influence child well-being, resilience can be a protective factor that changes and replaces the negative influences of the adverse circumstances that children experience (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2017:814). By enhancing resilience, children improve their emotional and social competence and better their self-concept of themselves which can support their mental well-being (Minkkinen, 2013:550; Naidoo & Muthukrishna, 2016:6).

2.5.1.9 Children's participation in their well-being

In recent times there has been an increased focus on obtaining children's own views about child well-being to inform interventions that can support sustainable futures for them (Lombard & Viviers, 2014:84; Manyena et al., 2008:313). Children can participate in matters concerning their well-being in different ways.

Children can help other children, for example, by donating toys they no longer play with. Donating toys that are in an acceptable condition helps low-income families who cannot afford to buy toys for their children, and keep the toys out of landfills, which decreases environmental pollution (Turner, 2022). Children should be kind to others as how they treat others around them is important to them as well (Marinis, 2022). According to Youngs, Yaneva and Canter (2021:1), helping others refer to the interpersonal characteristic of kindness, where people help

each other without expecting something in return. To show kindness to others improves a person's social interaction with others, decreases anxiety levels, and improves subjective well-being, physical health, and life satisfaction (Youngs et al., 2021:1).

Children can also contribute to helping animals in many ways (Castaneda, 2019). Animals play an important part in people's lives and in the environment, and therefore it is important to help animals in need. People can, for example, help animals by donating supplies or funds to animal shelters. To help animals to stay healthy and be happy, people can donate products such as toys, blankets or food for animals who are thin and hungry. To help animals in need is satisfying for people and makes a difference in the animals' lives (Castaneda, 2019). Therefore, supporting the well-being of others helps to improve the mental, social and environmental well-being of children (Minkinnen, 2013:550-551; Newland et al., 2019:395). By providing support to others, thus to other microsystems, relates to the importance of a strong mesosystem (Berk, 2013:27; Louw et al., 2014:29).

Children can take responsibility for enhancing their own physical and emotional health and well-being. Physical activity is good for the mind and bodies of children. Physical activities and outdoor play enhance children's physical functioning such as their gross and fine motor skills as well as their emotional health as it leads to feelings of happiness and lowers stress levels (Goldstein, 2012:3, 5-6). It is important for children to get enough rest, eat healthy foods, drink enough water, and stay active to have enough energy for each day (Sesame Workshop, 2017:33, 37). By doing their school homework, children gain skills such as setting goals, concentration, self-regulation, time management, and positive attitudes, which are essential for their academic development and life-long success (McNulty, 2018:6-7). When children complete homework tasks, positive work ethics develop that will last into the child's later life stages (McNulty, 2018:7).

Children themselves can take the initiative to keep their personal and natural environment clean. Daily household tasks are often observed as boring and tedious, however can have many advantages for children (Li, 2016:2497). Chores in their home such as helping to mow or trim the lawn, to prepare food such as peeling, chopping, and helping with washing dishes can be matched with the child's age. Helping with household chores have benefits such as enhancing interpersonal skills, personal responsibility, and socio-emotional skills such as empathy to support parents in their everyday tasks (Li, 2016:2497); showing that helping in the home can contribute to children's positive development and well-being.

Interactions in the natural environment have been proven to benefit children's well-being (Adams & Savahl, 2017:425-426). Given research findings that children place value on the natural environment (Adams et al., 2019:560), children might be motivated to help keep their

neighbourhood and natural environment clean and free from pollution. The importance of a clean neighbourhoods for children is emphasised by UNICEF (2018:42), suggesting that in line with the Sustainable Development Goals 11 and 12, child-responsive urban surroundings must involve waste management and clean cities which municipalities need to maintain to decrease health issues for children.

However, children are vulnerable and dependent on their parents. For children to grow throughout their childhood, they depend on their parents to meet their needs (World Health Organization, 2012:1). To care for children also means to keep children safe, to give them attention, love and opportunities to learn; to nurture them and teach children to laugh; and to listen to the child's uncertainties, problems and concerns (Efe, 2017).

Parents can help their children to experience a sense of accomplishment. Children can do chores around the house such as picking up toys, setting the table and taking out the rubbish (Berry, 2022). Parents can use rewards and praise to strengthen and maintain existing behaviours or teach new ones (Bear, Homan & Morales, 2018:S6H4-1). Rewards can consist of material objects such as toys, snacks, stickers, and activities such as free time or screen time as preferred by the child. Providing feedback to children as soon as desired behaviour takes place and often acknowledging good behaviour helps the child to recognize good behaviour and feel successful, which builds competence in the child (Bear et al., 2018: S6H4-3). According to Louw and Louw (2014a:239), children develop a mastery orientation when they experience success when completing a task, in which they value their hard work and their abilities to complete tasks. When a child develops a positive outlook about his abilities and himself, it leads to a positive view of the self, which is a feature of subjective child well-being (Minkinnen, 2013:550).

Parents can also teach and guide children to become more independent. What children learn while growing up improves their futures as they use what they have learned (World Health Organization, 2012:5). Parents who communicate with, help, and play with children and vice versa, assist children to be more competent, for example, to solve problems by themselves, which will enhance children's well-being (World Health Organization, 2012:5-6). Children learn new skills by doing things by themselves, therefore, teaching children age-appropriate skills and self-reliance can enhance their well-being (Berry, 2022; World Health Organization, 2012:7-8).

2.5.2 Risk factors to child well-being

Negative conditions and experiences have an adverse impact on the well-being of children. Children are a vulnerable group and depend on their parents for care, love, affection, and survival; however, this dependency can influence the emotional and physical well-being of the

child (Fattore & Mason, 2017:285). Parental love provides children with the opportunity to experience love and the understanding that they are important to others and surrounded by the care and protection of others (Aleksiejuk, 2015:162)

Boyden and Mann (2005:3) state that children are considered most vulnerable in the face of challenges because of their age and their lack of social power. Therefore, the well-being of children is at the mercy of the situations around them, for instance unsafe communities, violence, and low-income families. Situations such as poverty, armed conflict, forced migration, exploitation and environmental degradation negatively influence the well-being of children and children who experience these situations are affected mentally, spiritually and physically (Boyden & Mann, 2005:3).

2.5.2.1 Poverty and unemployment

Socio-economic factors such as poverty and low-income levels influence the development of children, especially their educational and cognitive development, their health, and their outcomes in adulthood (Chaundry & Wimer, 2016:23). Ayala-Nunes et al. (2018:812) state that at risk families face various adversities such as poverty, unemployment, low literacy skills, crowded households, and unsafe environments. Of these risks, low socioeconomic status (SES) and poverty are shown as the strongest predictors of adult's and especially children's adjustment (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:812). Poverty and situations related to it, such as material hardship, the exposure to violence, substance abuse and parental mental health problems, are risk factors known for the negative influence on the person's cognitive, physical, emotional, language, and social development. Hall (2019a:223) notes that the unemployment rate and income poverty can be related, as children who live with unemployed parents are more likely to experience child poverty.

According to Barnes and Wright (2012:136), poverty entails inappropriate low standards of living with deficient resources in the household. Poverty does not just influence the health and well-being of children but influences the development of the child through the presence of social and emotional difficulties (Moore & Ramirez, 2015:3). Children's health, well-being, access to services, nutritional status and their care are influenced by poverty, which impairs their cognitive development, educational achievement, and access to adequate health care. Families who are poor find it hard to provide the best educational opportunities and health care for children, which negatively affect the well-being and development of children (Martin, Hall & Lake, 2018:114).

Income poverty is associated with lower parental abilities to contribute to developmental inputs that support children's educational and developmental outcomes, for example obtaining educational books (Hall, 2019b:241). The impact of income poverty on individuals, especially

children, involves poor access to health, to safe environments, and to basic education (Hall, 2019a:221). Poverty increases parental stress, affects parents' mental well-being and parental skills and influence children's long-term developmental outcomes (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:813; Chaundry & Wimer, 2016:26). The psychological stress due to poverty and low income negatively affects parents' capacity to support their children's development. Effective parenting thus gets obstructed as parents engage less in a supportive, loveable, and interactive relationship that is important for the child's development, socio-emotional security, educational outcomes and growth (Chaundry & Wimer, 2016:26).

Poverty is linked to low birth weight, stunting, child mortality, and exposure to aggression, physical punishment or forced sexual acts (Casas & Frønes, 2019:3). Poverty reduces the day-to-day resources available and leads to material hardship. Material hardship means the inability to afford nutritious food and adequate food or the inability to satisfy basic needs such as housing and water, which may lead to worse child outcomes (Chaundry & Wimer, 2016:26).

Children being exposed to poverty experience stress that negatively influences the development, functioning and structure of the young child's brain (Chaundry & Wimer, 2016:26). Early childhood poverty is strongly associated with poor cognitive development and negative educational results (Chaundry & Wimer, 2016:26). Infants and toddlers who experience income poverty are 30% less likely to finish high school. Decreasing child poverty will contribute to significant improvement in children's well-being, health, and development (Chaundry & Wimer, 2016:27-28).

2.5.2.2 Family structure and family instability

The living arrangements of children and the lives of families are diverse. In today's life, less children are living with both biological parents who are married and more live with unmarried parents, whether it is with two cohabiting stepparents, two biological cohabiting parents, or with a single parent (Brown, Manning & Stykes, 2015:177). The rise in stepfamily and unmarried parents living together have resulted in instability of families, resulting in children living across multiple family circumstances through childhood (Brown et al., 2015:177). It has been found that the lives of children who live with one parent are the least stable in comparison to children who live with both parents (Dinisman, Andresen, Montserrat, Strózik & Strózik, 2017:106). Children who lived in families in which parents were separated were less satisfied with their family life, while those living with both parents experienced better subjective well-being.

Children's well-being can also be influenced by the instability of families. Children who lost a parent are more vulnerable as they experience the loss of a protective system, namely of the person who protected them and whom they need to support them to grow into adulthood and

make main decisions on their behalf (SOS Children's Villages, 2016:4). Some children experience the reality in their household of parents not being present in their lives. The absence of parents can be caused by factors such as labour migration, poverty, and low marriage rates (Hall, 2019c:217).

Adamsons and Johnson (2013:590) analysed the influence of father involvement on child well-being by using the conceptual framework of Palkovitz (2007) to arrange the father involvement forms in children's lives. These forms are behavioural style, for example control and monitoring; affective climate, for example, connection; and involvement and relational synchrony, for example teaching and parenting. Children mentioned that a father is important for them to live well, and a good relationship between a father and a child reflects the emotional state of the child (Adamsons & Johnson, 2013:590). The authors conclude that different forms of fathering had different effects on children's well-being. Furthermore, they suggest that children whose fathers are absent can be "at risk in all areas of well-being" whereas absent fathers who remain involved in their children's lives have a positive effect on their children's well-being, especially on their relationships and social skills (Adamsons & Johnson, 2013:598). According to Gežová (2015:48) the role of the father is important for boys as well as for girls, as the father is an example for the boy and an ideal for his daughter (Štrbová, 2004 in Gežová, 2015:48). Richter, Chikovore and Makusha (2010:360) believe that the negative impact of uninvolved fathers on the well-being of families and children make father involvement and presence in the lives of their children a critical issue that requires attention in social policies and programmes.

2.5.2.3 Adverse childhood experiences

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) pose various challenges that can negatively influence the well-being and health throughout a child's life span and are thus specified as a big concern in societies (Grimes, 2017:18). Social adversities are pointed out by Ayala-Nunes et al. (2018:812) as single parenthood, poverty, unemployment, low literacy skills, dangerous neighbourhoods, crowded households, low wage jobs, amongst others. ACEs refer more to traumatic and abusive experiences that children are exposed to, including emotional, physical and sexual abuse, physical and emotional neglect, domestic violence and substance abuse in the home, and parental separation or divorce or mental illness of a person in the household (Boullier & Blair, 2018:133; Moore & Ramirez, 2015:2).

ACEs clearly have a negative impact on the well-being of children. Davis, Costigan and Schubert (2017:4) state that a stable, nurturing, and safe family and community lie at the heart of the healthy growth and development of children. Children experiencing adversity at a young age are more vulnerable to experience the long-term effects thereof. Children are at higher

risk of developing cancer, heart disease and other illnesses when exposed to emotional and physical abuse and to alcohol and drug abuse of parents or a family member, and when living in extreme poverty (Davis et al., 2017:4). Attending to adverse childhood experiences is a top priority for policy makers and social workers to prevent children's exposure to trauma (Grimes, 2017:18).

2.5.2.4 Negative home environments

The immediate home environment of the child has a significant impact on the child's development and well-being. This statement is highlighted by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory that indicates that the relationships between individuals in the microsystem are bidirectional and therefore family members will have a strong influence on each other (Berk, 2013:27 Louw et al., 2014:29).

Children's adjustment and happiness can be affected by unstable home environments (Akram, Anjum & Akram, 2015:177). According to Casas and Frønes (2019:7), children who experience chaos and stress at home where they are unable to adapt in their environment will most likely encounter negative effects that will last over a long-term period. These conditions as well as poverty and mental health problems influence children's subjective well-being due to their experiences of early stressors and depression (Casas & Frønes, 2019:7). Poor parenting and child neglect also contribute to poor child mental health as it creates a poor relational climate in the home (Nahkur & Kutsar, 2019:358). Physical harm, violence and abuse have adverse impacts on the mental health of children as it leads to post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, aggressive behaviour, and depression in children (Lake, Shung-King, Hendricks, Heywood, Bradshaw & Chirinda, 2019:45).

In addition, the well-being of children is influenced by overcrowded informal households (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2021:3). Overcrowded households are measured by the number of residents compared to the number of rooms in the house (Chatindiara et al., 2021:3). An overcrowded household can be described as a dwelling where "there is a ratio of more than two people per room (excluding bathrooms but including kitchen and living room)" (Hall, 2019:250). The author explains that a home will be regarded as overcrowded when more than eight members live in a home consisting of two bedrooms, a sitting room and a kitchen.

Overcrowded households are associated with socioeconomic difficulty and a stressful home environment (Chatindiara et al., 2021:3). This environment has an impact on children's rights, well-being, and the basic needs of children regarding health, privacy, and educational achievement. Overcrowded households can influence the educational achievement of children as they are not able to do homework or study in an overcrowded household. The health of children can be negatively influenced as diseases spread faster. Furthermore, the privacy of

children may be affected, for example when washing or changing, and children are at greater risk of sexual violence and abuse (Hall, 2019d:250). Children living in an overcrowded household are negatively affected by limited space, for example to practice skills, to do homework, to interact with other family members, to develop their own identities, and to rest (Chatindiara et al., 2021:3).

2.5.2.5 A lack of basic services

Martin et al. (2018:117) state the importance of clean water and effective sanitation for the health, nutrition and development of all children. Insufficient sanitation has an impact on children's safety, health and dignity and places the child at risk to experience health issues such as cholera, eye infections, malaria, and skin diseases (Hall, 2019e:253-254). Children, especially children going to school, face the issue of the lack of access to socially acceptable and clean toilets (bathrooms). Children need to have access to toilets regularly to stay healthy. Constipation, infection in the bladder and soiling are health issues which are caused by dirty toilets and bathrooms (NT Contributor, 2012). Insufficient sanitation does not only influence the health and safety of children but also influence other aspects of their well-being such as their mental well-being, dignity, and children's capacity to concentrate (Hall, 2019e:253-254; Minkkinen, 2013:551; Nahkur & Kutsar, 2019:354). The wider influence demonstrates that the indicators of well-being are interrelated (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014:6).

A lack of clean bathroom facilities also affects children's consumption of water. Dirty bathrooms cause children to drink less water as they do not want to go to a dirty bathroom to drink water, causing children to dehydrate which causes bladder problems, bowel problems, difficulty to concentrate, tiredness and headaches (NT Contributor, 2012). A lack of clean water has an impact on children's health as they are in risk of gastro-intestinal infections, diarrhoea and dehydration that can lead to high child mortality rates (Hall, 2019e:252). Children will not be able to survive without safe drinkable water. Without taps and soap to wash hands, diseases will spread faster. Young children are more vulnerable and water-related diseases remain among the causes of death in children and the increase in malnutrition and stunting (UNICEF, 2020b). Water polluted by human waste, chemical and industrial waste, and trash present risk factors that causes diseases and death.

Children have the right to safe water and sanitation (UNICEF, 2020b). Clean and safe drinkable water are essential for the health of every individual and decrease the risk of illnesses such as diarrhoea, especially among young children (Edokpayo, Rogawski, Kahler, Hill, Reynolds, Nyathi, Smith, Odiyo, Samie, Bessong & Dillingham, 2018:2). Not having access to clean water has an impact on children's health and well-being. Children need to fetch and carry water from rivers or communal taps which are far from home. As a result, they

may experience back problems and the time used to fetch water put their educational achievement at risk as rather than spending time on schoolwork, they need to spend time fetching water (Hall, 2019e:252).

2.5.2.6 Poor education

Basic education and school are important for the development of children. Children who are not attending school can be at risk of poor living conditions, unemployment, and a lack of skills and knowledge. Education according to Kapur (2019), positively influences children's well-being. Children who receive educational opportunities can implement knowledge and skills to do tasks and promote their own well-being and contribute to the well-being of the community (Kapur, 2019). Hall (2018:149) highlights that education is a socio-economic right which forms the foundation for economic participation and lifelong learning. Children experience sustainable outcomes when school education is achieved. On the other hand, poor education will negatively affect children's cognitive development and their ability to develop the skills to earn an income later in life. A lack of education or poor education will therefore affect different domains of children's well-being such as their cognitive, mental and material well-being (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014:1; Nahkur & Kutsar, 2019:355; Newland et al., 2019:395; Minkkinen, 2013:550).

2.5.2.7 Poor health and nutrition

For every child to grow up as a healthy adult, basic nutrition is important. Children's well-being can thus be influenced if they do not have adequate nutrition. Inadequate nutrition can lead to malnutrition and hunger in children and can also result in children experiencing stunting, underweight, and wasting (Sambu, 2019:235). Underweight children weigh less than they are exposed to weigh for their age. Minkkinen (2013:550) states that poor nutrition and insufficient food have detrimental influences on the physical well-being of children. Well-being is a multidimensional concept which indicates that different domains of well-being influence each other; therefore, inadequate nutrition can influence the mental well-being of children, which include the cognitive and emotional functioning of the child (Minkkinen, 2013:551; Nahkur & Kutsar, 2019:354).

Basic nutrition is important for every child to grow and develop as a healthy adult. Healthy eating is important for children's health and forms the basis for a healthy and active lifestyle (Department of Health, 2016:1). Healthy eating and healthy food relate to eating a fair amount of food from all the food groups in order to live healthily as a single food group is not sufficient to provide the individual with all the nutrients needed to attain good health. Fruit and vegetables are essential foods to eat as they are rich in fibre, vital vitamins and minerals (Khodaei, Moghadam, Khademi & Saeidi, 2015:1184). A healthy diet enhances overall health

and protect individuals against malnutrition and diseases such as cancer, heart diseases, diabetes, and stroke (Khodaei et al., 2015:1184). Signs of children who do not follow a healthy diet are weight gain and slow weight loss (Department of Health, 2016:1).

2.5.2.8 Risk factors related to the COVID-19 pandemic

Every child is dependent on others for care, love and support, which can affect the well-being of children (Fattore & Mason, 2017:285). The coronavirus pandemic that started in the year 2020 in South Africa had an impact on the lives of many children and contributed to the vulnerabilities of children and thus affected their well-being. COVID-19 has negatively influenced children as it increased poverty and crime, and exposed children to lower levels of health care, child protection, education, social services, and safety (Naidoo & Muthukrishna, 2016:4). COVID-19 has negatively influenced the well-being of many children in all countries and for some children the influence of the pandemic will have a lifelong influence on their lives (United Nations, 2020:2). The after-effects of COVID-19 have negatively influenced nutrition, food security and employment rates, which lead to hunger and poverty.

The United Nations' report on the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on children describes different ways in which the pandemic affected children's lives (United Nations, 2020). A home should be a place where children are safe and experience security, however due to lockdowns some children experienced a home environment where they experienced abuse, neglect and violence (United Nations, 2020:10). Many children's well-being and safety were affected as they experience overcrowded households which resulted in a lack of privacy, violence, sexual abuse and unsanitary situations (United Nations, 2020:3).

The COVID-19 pandemic had a huge impact on child poverty. During the pandemic, children living in poor households experienced lower household income, lower access to health care services, limited tools to access online learning, and more co-morbidities (United Nations, 2020:11). With the closure of schools in South Africa during the pandemic, large numbers of children were not able to access online classes as they had no access to internet, phones or laptops as their families could not afford them (United Nations, 2020:7). The closure of schools had a significant impact on children, especially children who received free meals at school. As a result, rising numbers of malnutrition were found across 143 countries, causing millions of children to experience malnutrition because children who relied on the free school meals were left with no meals per day (United Nations, 2020:3).

During the pandemic, children were less likely to get infected by COVID-19 virus than adults (United Nations, 2020:8), however children's well-being was affected in other ways. The pandemic caused anxiety and stress in families and children, negatively influenced children's cognitive development, and could lead to long-term mental health threats to children. The

spread of COVID-19 was higher in informal communities and poor households, as these communities have a shortage of clean water and facilities for hand washing and individuals need to share facilities, causing the virus to spread faster (United Nations, 2020:10-11).

2.5.2.9 Poor environmental quality

Pollution is the biggest environmental cause of death and diseases in today's world (Landrigan, 2018:102). For children, pollution can lead to developmental impairments and effects such as injuries that harm children's health, reduce their ability to learn, and lower their future development (Landrigan, 2018:102).

Water pollution occurs when unacceptable materials such as industrial and domestic waste that include plastics, paper, textiles, and trash enter the water of rivers, dams, lakes, and the ocean and cause changes in the standard of the water, which is dangerous to people's health and to the environment (Haseena, Malik, Javed, Arshad, Asif, Zulfikar & Hanif, 2017:16). Polluted water influences the health of people by causing and spreading contagious diseases such as cholera, typhoid fever, and diseases such as vomiting, diarrhoea, and skin and kidney problems. Polluted water also leads to health risks such as cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, cancer and neurological disorders in people and causes the death of birds, fish, sea plants and organisms which are needed to provide people with food (Haseena et al., 2017:16- 17; Kilic, 2021:131).

The entire ecosystem, including humans and sea creatures, are negatively influenced by water pollution (Kılıç, 2021:130). Children are especially vulnerable to polluted water as it influences their digestive, immune, and nervous systems while they are still developing (Proudlock et al., 2019:23). Minkinen (2013:550) emphasise that polluted water has long-term influences on the physical well-being of children, which involve their health, illness, and physical functioning. It is important that appropriate waste disposal systems are in place so that waste can be prevented from going into the ocean or rivers. Waste that contributes to water pollution can be thrown away and placed in plastic bags (Haseena et al., 2017:17). Awareness and educational programmes should also be implemented to prevent water pollution (Haseena et al., 2017:18). It is essential to educate people on the negative influences of water pollution to prevent it from occurring (Kılıç, 2021:130).

Clean air is needed by all living animals and people as it aids good health and well-being (Mabahwi, Hoon Leh & Omar, 2014:221). Air pollution include components such as dust, smoke, salt particles and soot, and are mostly produced by industries and natural processes such as air movement, volcanic activity, grass and forest fires and biological elements such as viruses, pollen grains, and bacteria (Mabahwi et al., 2014:223). Air pollution is also caused by man-made processes such as the release of diesel exhaust particles, wood smoke, ash

and dust in the air which causes the air quality to decrease (Mabahwi et al., 2014:224, 227). Both household pollution, for example toxic smoke released from fires for cooking, and natural disasters have negative environmental influences that are experienced especially by children who live in poor communities (Alston, 2015:357; Rother, Wijesekera & Ward, 2019:165).

Air pollution links to the extent of substances in the atmosphere that are threatening to the health of all humans, animals and food crops, and cause damage to the climate and materials (Shaltami, Hamed, Fares, Errishi, Oshebi & Maceda, 2020:17). Polluted air can have various negative effects on people. These include adverse health effects such as cardiovascular and respiratory diseases and cancer (Mabahwi et al., 2014:225). People can experience blurred vision, headaches, drowsiness, and asthma when exposed to carbon monoxide which are produced by heavy traffic (Mabahwi et al., 2014:227). As a result of the health effects, air pollution can also lead to missed educational opportunities, lost productivity, and risks to other developmental opportunities (Mabahwi et al., 2014:222).

Pollution control therefore needs to be made a priority to focus on, because important aspects such as the health and well-being of present and future generations are affected (Landrigan, 2018:104). The role of the environment in child well-being needs to be focused on more as a clean environment without any pollution is crucial for children's well-being (Adams et al., 2019:547; Buck et al., 2018:1263; David & Weinstein, 2013:4).

2.6 LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORKS PROMOTING CHILD WELL-BEING

Children are seen as a vulnerable group and various factors, as discussed, can influence the well-being of children. To promote the well-being of children, international, regional, and local legislative frameworks are found to promote the well-being of children. Some of these frameworks will be discussed in this section.

2.6.1 International frameworks

Internationally, children's rights are stipulated in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) (United Nations, 1989). In recognising the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations regard children as needing special care and assistance and notes that the family forms the natural environment of the child and therefore must assume the responsibility for the development and the well-being of children (Preamble, United Nations, 1989). Many of the articles in the CRC stipulate specific aspects that relate to the dimensions that are specified in the concept of child well-being. As examples, Article 27 recognises children's right to an acceptable living standard that will support children's holistic development; Article 28 states children's right to education; Article 29 stipulates the right of children to develop their personality and capabilities to their fullest potential; and Article 24

states children's right to nutritious food and drinkable water and highlights the risks of pollution of the environment. The CRC provides states guidelines for enhancing children's development, their potential and their well-being in terms of aspects such as their quality of life, including the physical, social, psychological, material and cultural aspects thereof, as well as their right to protection (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014:1; Casas & Frønes, 2019:2).

In Article 3 (1) the best interest of the child is emphasized as a primary consideration in the actions regarding them, and Article 12 states children's right to freely express their views on all matters that have an impact on them and that their views should be heard (United Nations, 1989). Therefore, the right of children to participate and convey their views are acknowledged. According to Ben-Arieh et al. (2014:4) these rights involve freedom of expression; therefore, children must be motivated to express their feelings and thoughts about their own lives. Children's autonomy needs are recognised in the CRC and their views must inform policies to improve their well-being (Casas & Frønes, 2019:2).

Globally, the well-being of children can also be connected to the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (United Nations, 2015). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development focuses on the reduction of poverty, on protecting the environment, and on sustainable development for all by enhancing social, economic, and environmental dimensions of development (United Nations, 2015). The 2030 Agenda foresees a world that will invest in the empowerment of especially children and vulnerable individuals (Vision 23) and invest in children (Vision 8). In Vision 51 it emphasises that children have unlimited capabilities and must therefore actively participate in efforts to create a better future of them (United Nations, 2015). Bhardwaj, Sambu and Jamieson (2017:28) note that several of the sustainable development goals (SDGs), for example those focusing on no poverty, no hunger, gender equality, access to education, and clean air and sanitation, significantly affect the lives of children. It is noted by Nunes, Lee and O'Riordan (2016:3) that the three pillars of sustainable development, namely social, economic, and environmental development, focus on health and healthy lives as well as the well-being of people of all age groups.

The aim of the Agenda is to provide individuals with a sustainable future, which means to meet the needs of people with regards to positive social and environmental development, economic growth and the elimination of hunger and poverty (United Nations, 2015). Social development refers to interventions where conditions are created for people to use resources to develop to their full potential (Dominelli, 1997 in Hawkins, 2010:73). On its own, economic growth will not meet people's basic human needs; therefore, sustainable development must also focus on the social and environmental aspects of people's wider ecological context (Hawkins, 2010:73).

The three dimensions of the sustainable developmental goals are balanced, integrated and indivisible and sustainable development contributes to promote the well-being of children as emphasised in goal three of the sustainable developmental goals to “promote the well-being of children and to make sure that all children of all ages live a healthy life” (UNICEF, 2018). Sustainable development focuses on satisfying the needs of the current generation without affecting future generations’ capacity to satisfy their own needs. It emphasises the concept ‘needs’, especially the needs of the poor which should be a priority, as well as the notion of limitations that will affect the ability of the environment to meet needs in the present and in the future (WCED, 1987 in Peeters, 2012:291). Supporting children’s rights is an investment in their future and supports sustainable futures for them (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014:15). The increased focus on creating environments that can support children’s development and well-being has resulted in an increase in studies focusing on children’s subjective well-being (Casas & Frønes, 2019:10).

2.6.2 Regional frameworks

In the *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child* (ACRWC), children’s rights are set forth for the African context (African Union, 1990). The ACRWC is intended to promote and protect the rights and welfare of all children and is critical for ensuring that African children obtain effective care, safety and support that will enhance their, physical, mental, social emotional and moral well-being (Hansungule & Boezaart, 2017:45). In the Preamble, of the ACRWC it is recognised that the development and well-being of many African children are affected by issues such as armed conflict, natural disasters, exploitation, socio-economic factors, and hunger. African children are regarded as being in a “unique and privileged position”, which places the responsibility on all people to promote children’s rights and protection and allow them to live a life of dignity, security and freedom (African Union, 1990). In the ACRWC, Article 4 highlights the best interest of the child as being a key consideration in all the actions regarding a child and Article 7 that every child “who is capable of communicating his or her own views shall be assured the rights to express his opinions freely in all matters” (African Union, 1990).

Agenda 2063, the Africa We Want is a further regional mandate that focuses on the sustainable development and growth of all Africa’s people (African Union, 2015:1). The agenda provides a strategic framework to achieve these goals and was developed with consideration of the national, regional, and continental priorities contained in other developmental frameworks and plans for the continent (African Union, 2015:23; Royo, Diep, Mulligan, Mukanga & Parikh, 2022:2). The authors state that where the SDGs provides an international framework, Agenda 2063 emphasised regional priorities (Royo et al., 2022:8).

The Agenda stipulates a set of seven aspirations for the African continent in the future, including sustainable development, a united and peaceful continent with common values and ethics, respect for human rights, and becoming an influential global role player (African Union, 2015:29). Among these, Aspiration 6 includes aspects related to the well-being of children, stating a goal of “An Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children” (African Union, 2015:29). This aspiration guided the principle that all citizens must be actively involved in creating social, economic, environmental, and political development for all, so that “Africa will be a continent where no child, woman or man will be left behind” (African Union, 2015:40).

2.6.3 National frameworks

The discussion of national frameworks to enhance child well-being will focus on the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA, 1996), the National Development Plan 2030 (National Planning Commission, 2012) and the Children's Act 38 of 2005. Children are viewed as a vulnerable group (Department of Social Development, 2013b:30), and these local mandates are important in protecting their rights and well-being.

In the Bill of Rights of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, specific stipulations are stated for confirming children's rights in addition to the rights stated for all South Africa's people (RSA, 1996). Section 7 emphasises the democratic values that support the rights of all people, namely human dignity, freedom, and equality. Section 28 focuses more on the rights of every child. These rights include the right to parental, family or suitable alternative care for children, their rights to shelter, nutrition, basic health care and social services, and to protection from different forms of maltreatment, including abuse or work inappropriate for the child's age. Sections 27 and 28 respectively state all people's right to housing as well as to food, water and health care (RSA, 1996).

Throughout the sections in the Constitution, it is mentioned that legislation appropriate to the specific section will apply to the implementation thereof, of which the following examples are presented. The objective of the Child Justice Act 75 of 2008 is to provide children in conflict with the law with a fair criminal justice process. The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007 examines all aspects of the law that are relevant to sexual offences against children and provides protection for the vulnerable victims of sexual offences. This Act is also relevant to support children who are living in overcrowded households and who are possible victims of violence and sexual abuse to protect these vulnerable children. In support of the Constitution, the Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998 also contributes to the protection of children by aiming to end all violence against women and children.

The Children's Act 38 of 2005 is one of the acts that gives effect to the stipulations of the Constitution (Preamble, Children's Act 38 of 2005). In its Preamble, the Act states that it sets out principles in terms of children's care and protection, the rights and responsibilities of parents, prevention and early intervention, and early childhood development, amongst others. Article 7 in the Act states the 'best interests of child standard' and Article 9 stipulates that this standard implies that the child's best interest must be considered in all matters related to the care, protection, and the well-being of the child. Article 10 highlights children's right to participation, stating that every child has the right to participate and present their views on matters that concern the child, with consideration of the child's age, stage of development and maturity. The stipulations regarding children's best interests and their rights to participation correlate with those in the CRC and the ACRWC as discussed earlier.

The National Development Plan was set in motion by South Africa in 2012 which aims to stop poverty and decrease inequality to guarantee a better and more positive future for all South Africans and their children (National Planning Commission, 2012:1, 24). It is stated that 74% of the indicators of the sustainable developmental goals are addressed by this plan (Stats SA, 2019:31). The National Development Plan includes several aspects that relate to the immediate and future well-being of children, for example a well-functioning economy, environmental well-being and sustainability, children's basic education and early childhood development, promoting the health of all people, and social protection to enhance the lives of people and ensure security of food and nutrition (National Planning Commission, 2012:2-3). It is stated specifically that "each and every child should enjoy benefits and services that is aimed to facilitate access to health care, social care, safety, education and nutrition" (National Planning Commission, 2010:72). All humans have the right to an environment that will not be harmful to their well-being and health and that will contribute to the development and use of natural resources that will be ecologically sustainable, as emphasized in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA, 1996).

Despite the above legislative frameworks, many South African children live in conditions and environments that have a negative impact on their well-being. An overview of the well-being of children in South Africa will be discussed next.

2.7 CHILD WELL-BEING IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

Information on the child population in South Africa is provided by Hall (2019c:216) as obtained from the General Household Survey 2002-2018 by Statistics South Africa. In mid-2018, children made up 34% of South Africa's population of approximately 57.7 million people, indicating 19.7 million children under the age of 18 years. Most of South Africa's children live in rural areas, and approximately half of the children live in the provinces of

KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo and the Eastern Cape and Gauteng have the largest child population in the country. It appears that there has been changes in child populations in the different provinces over the past two decades, which is seen as joining other households, being part of migrant families or natural changes linked with the number of new births in a province.

Children are exceedingly vulnerable in South Africa. A substantial number of South African children experience adverse childhood experiences, poverty, poor education, and poor health due to the socio-economic and racial inequality and inequalities between children living in urban and rural areas (Rees & Main, 2015:30; SAHRC & UNICEF, 2016:5). Although South Africa is a middle-income country, 59% – thus more than half – of the child population live below the "upper-bound" poverty line and 30 % live in a household where no parent is employed (Hall, 2019a:221). Hall (2019a:223) notes that about 70 % of children live in a household with only one parent employed (Hall, 2019a:223). The rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape and Limpopo have the highest child poverty rates in South Africa (Hall, 2019a:222). Unemployment in South Africa can lead to child poverty and is considered a critical issue. Women's unemployment rate (41,2%) is higher as that of men (33.9%), mainly because women are seen as children's caregivers, and they need to take care of children.

In South Africa, 57% of children live in informal housing and urban areas, and 83% of children live in formal housing in South Africa (Hall, 2019d:248). Hall (2019d:250) indicates that 3.5 million children (thus 18 % of the child population) live in overcrowded households in South Africa. Approximately 60 million children do not have access to clean drinkable water in their households, which can contribute to the high child mortality rate in South Africa (Hall, 2019d:253). Many South African children do not have access to sufficient sanitation (Hall, 2019e:252). In South Africa, 4.2 million children still have no access to toilets and children have no access to sanitation facilities and use buckets or pit latrines or other forms of sanitation that are not regarded as adequate, while over 340 000 do not have any sanitation facilities (Hall, 2019e:253).

Children's well-being also gets affected by the absence of fathers, family disintegration, domestic violence, and single-parent households (Patel, 2015:200; Richter & Dawes, 2008:86; Richter, Desmond, Hosegood, Madhavan, Makiwane, Makusha, Morrell & Swartz, 2012:3). More children experience living with only one parent in a household (Department of Social Development, 2021:7), while 14% percent of children lost one parent or both their parents and are classified as orphans, and 0.3 % of children live in child-headed households (Hall, 2019c:219). In 2018, it was indicated that 20% of children live with neither their biological parents, however it did not state whether they are orphans. Out of the children's population,

43% (8.5 million children) live with their mothers in their household without the presence of their fathers (Hall, 2019c:217-218).

Over two million children (11% of the child population) experience extreme hunger in their household and 27% of children under the age of five are stunted, making many children affected by persistent malnutrition and food insecurity (Sambu, 2019:235). The implementation of the 2030 Global Agenda gets obstructed by the economic and social inequality in South Africa (Lombard, 2015:484). Climate change negatively influence children, as their overall living conditions are affected by phenomena such as extended droughts, habitat change and floods, which results of the decrease of food security and income as well as risks for children's health and the prevalence of diseases such as bilharzia, malaria, cholera, and diarrhoea (Republic of South Africa, 2012:18-22). In South Africa, many individuals are more vulnerable and exposed to the influence of climate change due to poor environmental and socio-economic contexts. This causes children, especially infants, to be more at risk and affected by the adverse influence of climate change (Proudlock et al., 2019:23).

Numerous children are still exposed to the inequalities caused by apartheid (Richter & Dawes, 2008:79). Children in South Africa experience a variety of adverse conditions that expose them to oppression, suffering, political violence, and abuse despite the Government's commitment to rectify childhood adversity and enhance the overall quality of life and the well-being of children and although some progress has been made (SAHRC and UNICEF, 2016:5; Savahl et al., 2017:12). Hall (2018:155) emphasize that South Africa has made no progress in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals in terms of the number of youths who has no access to education, who have not completed their school education, and are not employed. It appears that South Africa's socio-economic capacity is not sufficient to deal with the problems that influence children (Van Breda & Theron, 2018:237).

2.8 SOCIAL WORKERS AS ADVOCATES FOR CHILD WELL-BEING

Social work can be described as a context-based profession that focuses on how humans are supported by the networks and systems in their social environment so that they can lead a successful life (Peeters, 2012:287). The social work profession is concerned with improving the well-being of people (International Federation of Social Workers, 2022). Developmental social work, which is the approach to social work followed in South Africa, is defined by Patel (2015:127) as "the practical and appropriate application of knowledge, skills and values to enhance the well-being of individuals, families, groups and communities in their social context." Developmental social work follows an ecosystems perspective that emphasises the functioning of the person within his or her environment and focuses on service delivery on the

micro-, mezzo- and macro levels (Patel, 2015:137). It can be concluded that social workers are able to deliver services with respect to all levels of children's environment, as described in the ecological systems theory as the theoretical framework for this study. An ecological approach to child well-being is important as children's environment directly and indirectly influences their well-being (Alaya-Nunes et al., 2018:816). Children's well-being is important for their functioning in the present and for their futures.

Lombard and Viviers (2014:83-84) argue that children must be included in interventions for sustainable development of the present and future generations. Peeters (2012:287) confirms that the social work profession has an important role to play in sustainable development. Social workers can adopt the role of advocate for a sustainable development movement for poor and vulnerable individuals to live in conditions where the environment is conducive to their lives (Hawkins, 2010:69). Advocacy involves social workers to speak on behalf of their clients, or they engage their clients to speak for themselves (Patel, 2015:145). Lombard and Viviers (2014:83) point to social workers' responsibility towards children to allow them to participate in their current and future development by stating the following: "Social workers are well positioned to advocate for the right of children to be heard."

To enhance children's well-being, it is important to obtain children's perspectives as they have the best knowledge of their own lives as children's "perception of well-being is highly personal" (Fattore & Mason, 2017:276-277). Therefore, children are in the best position to describe how well-being can be promoted and maintained and what well-being means to them. Social work is a rights-based profession where social workers focus on protecting and promoting human rights, especially that of individuals who are most vulnerable and at risk (Patel, 2015:129). Children must be given opportunities to express their views and their perspectives should be considered by adults, which is a right of children that is highlighted in the CRC (Casas, 2019:337). Enabling children to participate can bring unique and new insights into developmental issues, and children are willing and able to participate in decisions, especially those that will affect their lives (Lombard & Viviers, 2014:83).

The rights of South Africa's children are protected by legislation. The Children's Act 38 of 2005 is intended to protect children against harm and to comply with the rights of children, as set forth in Section 28 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA, 1996). These rights include the right to basic social services, nutrition and shelter, and health care services and to be protected from different forms of maltreatment. Although these rights are in place, children in South Africa still face various adversities such as the exposure to abuse, single parent households, poverty, dangerous environments, or substance abuse, which obstruct their rights to be fulfilled and negatively affect their well-being (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:812).

Ayala-Nunes et al. (2018:812) advise that social services follow a strength-based family intervention approach to move beyond the focus on children's protection only towards promoting positive adjustment and the well-being of children.

Developmental social work aims to tap into the strengths and resources within clients to enhance their personal functioning (Patel, 2015:127). Social work interventions will more likely be successful if they are attuned to children and family's needs and problems. Due to various challenges and issues, social workers cannot reach all clients, therefore they can enhance the capacity for service delivery by working with other professionals such as auxiliary social workers and cooperate with different sectors such as families, groups, communities, private and government sectors and organizations (Patel, 2015:126, 128). Service delivery as described in the Framework for Social Welfare Services emphasises services to start from the point of prevention of problems (Department of Social Development, 2013b:29-30). Prevention services focuses on "strengthening and building the capacity, self-reliance and resilience of service beneficiaries while addressing individual, environmental and societal factors to create conditions that enhance or support wellness" (Department of Social Development, 2013a:29). This level of service delivery emphasises the importance of identifying risk factors that can lead to the development of a problem or condition as well as protective factors that may protect people who are exposed to risks (Patel, 2015:206-207). Prevention services therefore places an emphasis on promoting the well-being of all South Africa's children.

In the next section, the researcher will provide an overview of the developmental characteristics of children in middle childhood. Children in this age group were the participants in this study.

2.9 THE CHILD IN MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

The participants in this research study were children between the ages of 8 and 12 years, thus in the stage of middle childhood. Middle childhood refers to the developmental stage of children between the ages of 6 and 12 years (Louw & Louw, 2014a:225). During this developmental stage, children show rapid growth and a wider exposure to experiences (Louw & Louw, 2014a:225). As described by Arnett (2016:300), middle childhood is the period "when children develop a preferable understanding of the physical world and the reality of what is, what is possible and what is not." Middle childhood is important for preparing children for the next life stage of adolescence (Louw & Louw, 2014a:225).

2.9.1 Physical development

Middle childhood is a stage of fast growth and the improvement of their gross and fine motor skills, mobility, balance, eye-hand coordination, vision and strengths (Berk, 2013:178;

Henderson & Thompson, 2016:32; Louw & Louw, 2014a:227). Their physical growth implies that they can effectively take part in activities such as running, jumping, and skipping, as well as throwing, catching and kicking balls. Many children start to take part in sports such as soccer, hockey and athletics (Berk, 2013:179, 181; Louw & Louw, 2014a:227). Children brain can reach the weight and size of an average brain of an adult during this developmental stage and is characterised by the development of especially the frontal lobes which are the brain areas linked to aspects such as impulse control, planning, judgement, reasoning, memory, and emotions (Louw & Louw, 2014a:226). Children in middle childhood can therefore master cognitive tasks of increasing complexity.

2.9.2 Cognitive development

Cognitive development refers to the changes in intellectual capacity of the child, including attention, memory, creativity, problem solving, imagination and language (Berk, 2013:5). Children are curious and try to cognitively make sense of their world through their own experiences and activities and develop a better understanding of what is possible or not (Arnett, 2016:300). Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development describes middle childhood as a critical time in children's cognitive development as their thoughts become more organized, logical and flexible, and more like the thoughts of adults (Berk, 2013:249; Louw & Louw, 2014a:299).

According to Piaget's theory, the child's cognitive development in middle childhood relates to the concrete operational stage (Louw et al., 2014:26). This stage implies that children start making use of mental operations to solve problems and to reason. According to Louw and Louw (2014b:229), mental operations involve strategies and rules that make children's reasoning more systematic. The child's thinking becomes more logical and organised, and they can master mental operations applied to numbers, for example addition and subtraction as well as multiplication and division (Berk, 2013:253; Louw & Louw, 2014a:229). Other mental operation capacities include understanding spatial relationship among objects, for example understanding directions and finding one's way in the environment, and categorizing objects, meaning that children can organize objects according to size, shape and colour (Arnett, 2016:300; Berk, 2013:250; Louw & Louw, 2014a:229). From the age of eight years, they are able to demonstrate spatial relationships in drawings and can describe what they have drawn, which refers to "map skills" (Berk, 2013:251).

In middle childhood, children's reasoning skills apply more to concrete information, and they find it more difficult to reason about abstract information (Berk, 2013:253; Henderson & Thompson, 2016:37). However, they start to understand the difference between reality and appearance, can link causes and effects to events, and can understand the perspectives of

others (Henderson & Thompson, 2016:37; Louw & Louw, 2014a:233). According to Piaget, reversibility is the most important operation that develops during this stage, which refers to and understanding that it is possible to reverse actions and mental operations as well as the effects thereof (Louw & Louw, 2014a:229).

During the concrete operational phase, children develop academic skills such as reading, memory, mathematics and writing, and their attention span and concentration increase (Berk, 2013:6; Henderson & Thompson, 2016:37). Children's language skills progress to understanding more words, multiple meanings of words, and understanding the abstract meaning and not only the concrete meaning of words (Berk, 2013:395; Louw & Louw, 2014a:234). Children develop good conversational skills and can communicate clearly and provide rich information in their conversations (Berk, 2013:395; Henderson & Thompson, 2016:37). They develop a wider vocabulary and use of more complex and longer sentences (Louw & Louw, 2014a:234; Martorell, Papalia & Feldman, 2014:291). During this development, children are exposed to more than one language, and they might become bilingual or even multilingual (Louw & Louw, 2014a:235).

2.9.3 Social development

The social world of children widens substantially as they spend more time outside the home in their community, school and with their peers. They become less dependent on the help of their parents and start to make more decisions about their life on their own (Louw & Louw, 2014a:262). However, their parents still play a primary role in their lives (Louw & Louw, 2014a:262, 299). From their interaction with the peer group, they gain new knowledge, try out new behaviours, become less dependent on their parents, learn social skills, and receive affection (Henderson & Thompson, 2016:43; Louw & Louw, 2014a:275). Relationships with friends become important and friendships are valued in terms of the faithfulness and loyalty between friends. An important component for children's socio-emotional well-being is peer acceptance (Louw & Louw, 2014a:276, 299).

Children start to work with others and obtain a better understanding of others and the self and also compare themselves to others (Berk, 2013:6, 454; Louw & Louw, 2014a:233, 256). A clear self-concept develops, and children can describe and judge themselves according to their behaviour, abilities, and appearance, as well as compare qualities of their peers to their own qualities. They can differentiate between the self and others, and from the perceived feedback from others, they form an image of the "ideal" self (whom they would like to be) and the "real" self (who they are in reality) (Louw & Louw, 2014a:256-257).

According to Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, children in middle childhood are in the stage of industry and inferiority stage of psychosocial development and during this

stage, children learn the physical, practical, social, and academic skills that they will need as adults (Henderson & Thompson, 2016:41). Children gain a sense of fulfilment from completing tasks that they regard as meaningful and interesting, and they seek acknowledgement when they manage to complete tasks (Martorell et al., 2014:395; Thomas, 2005:93). When they receive encouragement and praise for these tasks, children will develop a sense of competence, which will lead to the achievement of industry (Henderson & Thompson, 2016:41). However, when the child is not able to learn skills that is essential for the child to learn in this developmental stage, it implies that inferiority will be experienced.

It is thus important to give children opportunities and support to develop a sense of mastery (Arnett, 2016:23; Martorell et al., 2014:395; Thomas, 2005:93). Children who experience success develop a mastery orientation according to which they will see their success as the result of their abilities and hard work. On the other hand, children who do not experience success may develop a helpless orientation, in which they will doubt their own abilities, and avoid or stop trying to do tasks that they regard as difficult (Louw & Louw, 2014a:239-240). Therefore, children who do not receive support or encouragement, will fail to develop their age-appropriate potential or will develop it at a later stage (Thomas, 2005:93). These negative effects are likely to influence a sustainable future for the child as it may lower his or her chances of social inclusion and dignity (UNESCO, 2016:5).

Children start to attend school during middle childhood and school readiness is an important aspect of their adjustment and performance in school. Parents and caregivers who are involved in their children's schooling and who provide a stimulating home environment have a significant influence on their children's performance during the primary school and later school years (Louw & Louw, 2014a:238). The home environment plays an important role in providing the child with the opportunities to gain knowledge and skills to move into the world (Arora, 2018).

2.9.4 Emotional development

Children's knowledge of emotions helps them to get along with other people (Berk, 2013:416). Their cognitive development during middle childhood enables children to be more capable of understanding, controlling, and managing their emotions (Louw & Louw, 2014a:259). Their understanding of emotions relates to their ability to understand complex emotions, that a person can experience more than one emotion in a certain situation, understanding the situations or events that lead to certain emotions, and understand the facial expressions that indicate different emotions (Louw & Louw, 2014a:259-260). Children also have a better understanding of the difference between felt and expressed emotions (Louw & Louw, 2014a:260).

Emotional self-regulation skills develop during middle childhood. Children are able to use emotional regulation strategies, such as thinking how they will solve problems and, if not possible, how their distress can be controlled (Berk, 2013:412; Martorell et al., 2014:395). Children develop the ability to manage emotions by strategies such as suppressing, hiding or redirecting their emotions, which enhances their social competence and lowers problem behaviour (Louw & Louw, 2014a:260, 299).

Their emotional competence furthermore includes their ability to manage emotional display rules (Berk, 2013:419; Louw & Louw, 2014a:299). Emotional display rules involve controlling what is being communicated to others to comply with the emotional display rules of society in terms of how, when and where emotions are appropriately expressed (Berk, 2013:412). A child may, for example, look happy even though she is sad. The display rules become refined as children start to contemplate how their actions may have consequences for others. Children between the ages of six and eight years, begin to mentally think about and reflect on their emotions (Berk, 2013:412).

During middle childhood, children's empathy increases due to their understanding of their own and other's emotions. They can understand these emotions, the signs related to certain emotions, and appropriately respond to the emotional distress of others (Berk, 2013:417, 419; Martorell et al., 2014:395). Parenting practices have a significant influence on the development of empathy in children. Parents who show warmth, concern for their children's feelings, and encourage emotional expression in their children help children to regulate anger and teach them kindness, which supports the development of empathy (Berk, 2013:418).

2.9.5 Moral development

Moral development enables children to differentiate between what is wrong and right and is important for children to judge whether their behaviour conforms to the expectations of their society and culture (Louw & Louw, 2014a:287; Thomas, 2005:429). Moral values will differ in different contexts as it is affected by the social norms of a specific society as well as the development of the child's empathy (Louw & Louw, 2014a:287, 300). Louw and Louw (2014a:287) believe that the ability to distinguish right from wrong is one of the most critical tasks that children in middle childhood must achieve. In his theory on moral development, Jean Piaget believed that children in middle childhood respect rules and believe that rules must be obeyed (Louw & Louw, 2014a:289). According to Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development, children in their middle childhood can be seen as fitting into the pre-conventional level of moral development as they have not developed an understanding of rules as social conventions and thus accept the rules set by people who have authority (Louw & Louw, 2014a:291).

In conclusion, it is proposed that children in middle childhood will be able to provide their views on child well-being due to their developmental level. They, for example, will have the cognitive ability to understand the self and others, the emotional ability to understand complex emotions and emotion display rules, the moral reasoning to understand right and wrong, and the language to describe their views. They would thus be able to describe their understanding of the concept of child well-being and of factors associated with child well-being.

2.10 SUMMARY

In this chapter the researcher discussed child well-being. The researcher information on the concept child well-being, the dimensions and elements of child well-being; factors effecting child well-being; appropriate legislative frameworks; child well-being in South Africa context; social workers as advocates; and developmental characteristics of children in middle childhood. This information forms the background for the presentation of the empirical findings of this study, which focused on children's perspectives on child well-being. The research findings will be presented in Chapter 3. The research methodology and the ethical considerations of the study will also be discussed in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Children's well-being is determined by many factors that are important for children to feel good and to live well. Children have different views on the aspects that contribute to their well-being and as they have the best knowledge about their lives and their needs, they are in the best position to state their perspectives on their own well-being. The aim of the study was to explore the perspectives of children regarding their own well-being. In this chapter, the researcher will discuss the research methodology and the ethical considerations for the study, followed by the research findings of the study.

3.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology is discussed with reference to the research approach, type of research, research design, study population and sampling, data collection, data analysis and the pilot study.

3.2.1 Research approach

The study focused on children's perceptions of their well-being, thus their subjective well-being. Subjective well-being depends on the personal perspectives of a person and is socially and culturally constructed (Mashford-Scott et al., 2012:235; Fattore & Mason, 2017:278; Minkkinen, 2013:550). Therefore, an interpretivist research paradigm was relevant to the study. Interpretivism views reality as a social construct, meaning that the researcher studied the way that the participants constructed child well-being (Nieuwenhuis, 2019a:67).

It was important for the researcher to obtain the perceptions of children, as they would be able to provide information that is relevant to the goal of the study. A qualitative research approach was followed to get verbal descriptions of the participants' views on children's well-being (Fouché & Delport, 2011:64; Nieuwenhuis, 2019a:59). In following a qualitative research approach, a better understanding of the views of the participants could be formed by listening to their words rather than collecting numerical data. The limitation of using a qualitative research approach was that the research findings cannot be generalised as qualitative findings are more subjective and bound to a specific context (Anney, 2015:272; Fouché & Delport, 2011:60).

The purpose of the study was exploratory and descriptive. The researcher wished to obtain insight into the research topic as limited research on children's subjective well-being has been

conducted in South Africa, which linked to the exploratory purpose of the study. In terms of the descriptive purpose, the research findings are described to present a picture of the research findings on the phenomenon of children's subjective well-being (Fouché & De Vos, 2011b:95-96; Neuman, 2014:38).

3.2.2 Type of research

The type of research used for this study was applied research. The aim was to understand the perspectives that children have on child well-being. The aim of applied research is to describe the research findings so that the information could be used by social workers to solve problems in practice to meet the needs of children and inform policies (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delport, 2011:95). Through the research, it was attempted to gain an understanding of the perspectives of children on child well-being to inform social work practice. Social workers could consider and develop relevant and sustainable service delivery interventions to enhance child well-being that would be best suited go children's needs. Related to applied research, the study could thereby contribute to policy and/or solutions to problems to promote sustainable futures for children (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:94; Rubin & Babbie, 2017:145).

3.2.3 Research design

Definitions of a research design are often ambiguous, with some referring to it as all the decisions in planning a research project, while others see it as one phase in the research process (Fouché, Delport & De Vos, 2011:142; Fouché & Schurink, 2011:307). Fouché et al. (2011:143) define the research design in both quantitative and qualitative studies as a step in the research process that will enable researchers to collect and analyse data. The research design depends on the purpose of the study (Fouché & Schurink, 2011:312). In this study, the perspectives of a sample of children in a South African context were explored regarding the concept of child well-being. The case, in this study, thus consisted of multiple individuals (Fouché & Schurink, 2011:321). The case study design was relevant as the participants' views were explored by asking them "why" and "how" questions (Nieuwenhuis 2019b:90). Through the interaction between the researcher and the participants, the participants could freely share their opinions on the research topic, which provided insight into their views. The case study design therefore contributed to a better understanding of the social world of the participants (Fouché & Schurink, 2011:320; Nieuwenhuis 2019b:90).

The instrumental case study was relevant to the study. The instrumental case study applies to studies that aim to explore and describe a specific phenomenon, which in this study was the phenomenon of child well-being from the perspectives of a small sample of children (Fouché & Schurink, 2011:322). The use of the instrumental case study had a strong focus on providing insight into the phenomenon of child well-being rather than a focus on the case itself

(Baxter & Jack, 2008:544-559; Nieuwenhuis, 2019b:90).

3.2.4 Research methods

In this section, the study population and sampling, data collection, and data analysis will be discussed. Trustworthiness will also be discussed.

3.2.4.1 Study population and sampling

The study population consisted of children in middle childhood in South Africa who complied with the set of elements that was focused on in the research (Bless, Higson-Smith & Sithole, 2013:164). Data collection for this study occurred in Mbombela (Nelspruit) and White River in Mpumalanga Province, which formed the target population for the study (Bless et al., 2013:164).

The researcher aimed to collect data about a specific research topic from a sample of 10 participants. Non-probability sampling was utilised to recruit participants who would be able to provide information on the research topic and answers to the research question (Bless et al., 2013:166). Purposive sampling was utilised to select a study sample according to certain sampling criteria (Neuman, 2014:274; Strydom & Delport, 2011:392). The following inclusion criteria applied to group research project of which the study formed part, and thus to the study:

- Children between the ages of 8 and 12 years.
- Children who can converse in Afrikaans and English.
- Children whose parents or guardians provided permission that the children in their care may participate in the study.
- Children who provided their assent to voluntarily participate in the study.

The researcher did not have knowledge of children in the areas who would comply with the above criteria, therefore snowball sampling was used to gain access to participants for the study (Strydom & Delport, 2011:393). Two persons from the researcher's social environment, one in Mbombela (Nelspruit) and one in White River, were requested to each suggest a parent or guardian who would agree that their child participate in the study, provided that the inclusion criteria were being met and that the child was willing to voluntarily participate in the research. The mothers of the first two participants were contacted after their contact details were forwarded to the researcher. These mothers were requested to each suggest another potential participant in the same manner. This process was repeated until the required number of participants were recruited and sufficient data had been collected to achieve data saturation (Bless et al., 2013:239). The two participants from the pilot study were included in the final sample, which consisted of 11 participants. Seven participants were from Witrivier and four participants were from Mbombela (Nelspruit). None of the participants were from the researcher's social work caseload or from her personal friendship group.

3.2.4.2 Data collection and the pilot study

The researcher made use of semi-structured one-to-one interviews to gain information and collect data on the participants' views of child well-being. Semi-structured interviews, which are seen as helpful in exploratory studies, facilitated a process for obtaining an in-depth understanding of the perspectives of children on child well-being as their responses could be probed for additional information and clarified where needed (Bless et al., 2013:197; Greeff, 2011:351). The use of semi-structured interviews provided the researcher with time to prepare questions that would be asked to the participants and to discuss and explore their responses further to gain rich information on the research topic (Adams, 2015:492-494).

The interviews were conducted according to a set of open-ended questions contained in an interview schedule (Mock, 2005 in Mafokane & Shirindi, 2018:40). The questions were constructed to cover the range of information related to the research topic that the researcher could focus on (Greeff, 2011:352). The interview schedule is attached as Appendix A. Data collection was supported using visual communication cards during the interviews, as children may not fully understand all the aspects that influence child well-being (Nieuwenhuis, 2019b:103). The visual communication cards (refer Appendix B) included pictures of different aspects that can be related to children's well-being, for example a home, family, food, school, and hospital, which were noted in the literature review for the study as aspects relevant to children's well-being. The open-ended questions in the interview schedule were used first to get as much as possible information based on the participants' own views. The visual communication cards were introduced afterwards. It was found that the visual communication cards assisted the researcher in exploring specific aspects that were relevant to the study and ensured that these aspects were addressed. The participants could decide on which pictures they chose; therefore, the cards were used without the researcher influencing the participants. The visual communication cards thus served as a funneling technique (Greeff, 2011:352-353). The participants responded well to this visual technique as they showed interest in the pictures and chose pictures that they wanted to discuss. The interviews were digitally recorded with the permission of the participant's parents or guardians and the participants themselves. The researcher also made field notes during the interviews which consisted of reflective notes that allowed her to obtain a more in-depth understanding of the research topic (Schurink, Fouché & De Vos, 2011:406; Nieuwenhuis, 2019b:110).

Data was collected from a sample of 11 participants, including the two participants that formed part of the pilot study because of the comprehensive information provided by them. It was concluded that data saturation was obtained at a point in the process where no new information was obtained during the interviews. At that point, further data collection was no longer useful (Greeff, 2011:350; Makofane & Shirindi, 2018:34).

Some of the interviews were conducted in the researcher's office and some interviews at the participants' homes. The COVID-19 regulations as explained in the informed consent and assent forms were understood by the participants and parents and were supported and adhered to. Although the parents made provision for the interviews at home to be held in a private room with no interference by other persons, it was noted that the participants' concentration were slightly influenced by aspects such as a dog barking or a noise outside. However, this interference did not have a significant influence of the participants' ability to focus on the interviews.

The pilot study took place before commencing with data collection and was conducted with two participants who met the sampling criteria. The pilot study helped the researcher to determine whether the methodology, sampling, data collection instruments and data analysis were appropriate and sufficient (Bless et al., 2013:394). It was found that the interview questions and visual communication cards were appropriate for collecting sufficient information on the topic and were understandable for children between the ages 8 and 12 years, while the duration of the interviews was not too long for the participants (Casas, 2019:339; Strydom & Delport, 2011:394-395). It was concluded that the research methods chosen were successful in generating information for answering the research question (Arain, Campbell, Cooper & Lancaster, 2010:2; Mafokane & Shirindi, 2018: 41). The pilot interviews contained sufficient information and the participants were included in the final research sample.

3.2.4.3 Data analysis

The researcher transcribed the recordings of each of the interviews into a word document (Schurink, Fouché & De Vos, 2011:408). It was ensured that all transcripts and field notes were complete and cleared of any information that could identify the participants. The data were analysed by means of thematic analysis, which is relevant to data analysis in qualitative research (Nowell et al., 2017:4). Data analysis resulted in the identification of themes and sub-themes in the data (Clarke, Braun & Hayfield, 2015:124; Ebersöhn, Elof & Ferreira, 2019:177). The following phases in the process of thematic analysis were implemented (Clarke et al., 2015:230; Nowell et al., 2017:4):

- **Phase 1: Familiarisation**

The first step in data analysis involved the researcher becoming familiar with the entire data set. Thus, the data transcripts were organized and repeatedly read through in a critical way to get a general idea of the data (Clarke et al., 2015:231, Nowell et al., 2017:4-5; Schurink et al., 2011:409). During this process, the researcher made notes of ideas that could further her understanding of the data (Bless et al., 2018:342; Nowell et al., 2017:5).

- **Phase 2: Coding**

This phase required the identification of prominent themes and recurring ideas in the data, and assigning initial codes to aspects in the data that might be important to answering the research question (Schurink et al., 2011:410; Clarke & Braun, 2013:121). The researcher systematically worked through the data, wrote words or short phrases as codes in the text documents, and reviewed them to identify possible patterns and themes in the data (Bless et al., 2013:342; Clarke & Braun, 2013:121; Nowell et al., 2017:6). This process resulted in the identification for potential themes and formed the basis for the next step in the data analysis process (Bless et al., 2013:342; Clarke et al., 2015:234).

- **Phase 3: Generating themes**

Phase 3 involved reading through the codes to consider different combinations of codes and combining relevant codes into potential themes (Bless et al., 2013:343; Nowell et al., 2017:8). The themes were structured to show a pattern within the data set and form meaningful units of information to answer the research question (Braun, Clarke, Hayfield & Terry, 2019:844). The process resulted in the formulation of themes and sub-themes. The researcher compiled a thematic map in the form of a table to display the identified themes and sub-themes and to gain an idea of the connections between them (Braun et al., 2019:844-845; Clarke et al., 2015:236, 238). Sub-themes that supported a certain idea or topic were placed in categories and labelled with text codes to form initial themes (Bless et al., 2013:344).

- **Phase 4: Reviewing potential themes**

Next, the initial themes were reviewed to see how they were relevant to answering the research question (Nowell et al., 2017:9). The researcher determined whether the themes and sub-themes fitted together and made changes, for example combining codes that overlapped or restructuring codes that did not have enough data to support them (Clarke & Braun, 2013:121; Nowell et al., 2017:10). The potential themes and sub-themes were reviewed to evaluate their relevance to the research question and the phenomenon of child well-being. This process provided a general overview of the different themes and how they fitted together to present a story about children's perceptions of child well-being (Braun & Clarke, 2006:92; Nowell et al., 2017:9-10; Schurink et al., 2011:415).

- **Phase 5: Defining and naming themes**

The essence of every theme was captured during phase five by assigning names to each theme and providing a short description to explain the boundaries and scope of every theme (Braun et al., 2019:846; Clarke et al., 2015:240). This phase is important so that the reader

will get a sense of the central message of the theme (Clarke et al., 2015:240; Nowell et al., 2017:10).

- **Phase 6: Writing the research report**

The research findings, arranged according to themes and sub-themes, are reported in the research report. Phase six is an essential part of the data analysis process as it involved the final analysis and the presentation of the research findings (Clarke & Braun, 2013:121). The research report is intended to give a coherent, interesting, non-repetitive and logical description of the data to present readers with the story of the research (Nowell et al., 2017:10). Information from the literature review was included in the discussion of the themes and sub-themes and direct quotes of participants were included to enhance the data quality (Nowell et al., 2017:11).

It was kept in mind that the flexibility involved in thematic analysis could result in inconsistency and a lack of coherence, which requires researchers to implement measures to ensure trustworthiness (Braun & Clarke, 2006:78; Nowell et al., 2017:2-3). The aspect of trustworthiness, or data quality, will be discussed next.

3.2.4.4 Data quality

The researcher undertook to increase the data quality or trustworthiness of the research so that the perspectives of the participants would be represented truthfully (Bless et al., 2013:236; Schurink et al., 2011:419). The aspects of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were considered in this process (Nowell et al., 2017:3).

Credibility was enhanced by correctly presenting and interpreting the information gathered from the participants so that the research findings provide an accurate presentation of the participant's views (Nowell et al., 2017:3; Schurink et al., 2011:419-420). The strategies of reflexivity, peer debriefing and member checking were relevant to enhancing the credibility of the study. Through *reflexivity*, the researcher was aware that her own perspectives on child well-being could influence her objective presentation of the research findings. She was cautious against subjectivity during the collection and interpretation of the data by being constantly aware of how her personal bias could influence data collection and analysis (Lietz & Zayas, 2010:192; Schurink et al., 2011:419-420). Credibility was also being enhanced by continuously being mindful of how her own verbal and non-verbal reactions during the data collection interviews, thus researcher reactivity, could influence the participants' responses (Lietz & Zayas, 2010:192).

By means of *member checking*, the researcher clarified information with the participants after each interview to make sure that she correctly understood the information provided by them.

As the researcher might not be able to reach participants again after the interviews, she also reflected with them on the data gained in the previous interviews to see whether it could relate to their views (Lietz & Zayas, 2010:193-194). The clarification of the information helped the researcher to correctly report on the participant's views on child well-being. The researcher engaged in the strategy of *peer debriefing* through discussions with her research supervisor in which the research methodology, including data analysis, was discussed (Lietz & Zayas, 2010:196).

It is difficult to generalise findings of qualitative research studies, and in addition, generalisation is not the aim of qualitative research (Lietz & Zayas, 2010:195; Schurink et al., 2011:420). However, **transferability** can be improved by describing the participants, study context and study design comprehensively and attending to credibility (Lietz & Zayas, 2010:195). Based on the small study sample, transferability could not be ensured. A *thick description* about the context, research design and the participants to enable others to compare this context with other contexts in practice and improve the transferability of the research findings (Anney, 2014:278; Nieuwenhuis, 2019c:144-145; Nowell et al., 2017:3). The research findings were also discussed in terms of literature on child well-being and contextual factors that can influence it, as obtained from the literature review for the study.

Ensuring **dependability** required an indication of how each step of the research was implemented (Bless et al., 2013:237). Dependability was attended to by providing a *clear documentation* of the research process in the research report (Nowell et al., 2017:3). The researcher further engaged in *peer debriefing*, as described above, to support the dependability of the study (Schurink et al., 2011:420).

Confirmability refers to the neutral way in which the data are analysed to objectively present research findings that are not influenced by the interest and motivation of the researcher (Nowell et al., 2017:3; Schurink et al., 2011:421). Confirmability is further enhanced by presenting a clear description of how the research was implemented (Bless et al., 2013:237). In this study, dependability was enhanced by strategies such as *peer debriefing* and *member checking* (Lietz & Zayas, 2010:197). The researcher also focused on *reflexivity*, and was constantly aware of how her own actions, decisions and views could lead the way to personal bias and have an influence on the data collection and analysis (Lietz & Zayas, 2010:197; Schurink et al., 2011:421).

3.3 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

All social research should be guided by ethical considerations which declare the procedures, methods, and moral principles that should be adhered to (Strydom, 2011:114). The ethical considerations of the study ensured that the well-being of the participants were

preserved and prioritised above the researcher's need to carry out the research (Mills, 2014:24). The following ethical principles were most applicable for the study:

3.3.1 Avoidance of harm

The participants in the study were children in middle childhood and the researcher took into consideration she had to be sensitive to their needs, given that children are regarded as a vulnerable group (Bless et al., 2013:33-34). Although the research did not focus on children's personal experiences, it was possible that talking about child well-being might cause distress to some participants. The researcher was therefore aware to avoid any emotional and physical harm to the participants (Strydom, 2011:115). Participants were recruited with the assistance of their parents or guardians and at this stage it was clarified that participants who were considered too vulnerable would not be included in the study (Babbie, 2017:63; Strydom, 2011:115).

The parents and participants were also made aware of the voluntary nature of the study; thus, that children could choose not to participate in the study, that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences, and that they were not obligated to answer a question if they did not want to (Babbie, 2017:66; Strydom, 2011:115). The researcher repeated these conditions to the participants before the data collection interviews by reading through the informed assent letter with them. No participants withdrew from the study and no participants indicated that they did not want to respond to questions during the data collection interviews.

When planning the study, the researcher arranged with a registered social worker trained in counselling children for online or telephonic counselling free of charge for participants who might experience emotional distress due to participating in the study (Maree, 2020:49). The parents and participants were informed that they could contact the researcher at any time should participants experience emotional distress because of the data collection interviews. During the interviews, the researcher was attentive to any indication of discomfort that the participants might experience, and in addition inquired about the well-being of the participants during debriefing. The participants and parents were informed in the letters of informed consent and assent of the arrangements for counselling, if needed. No participants had to be referred for counselling.

The benefits of participating in the study, as stated in the research principle of beneficence, were considered important as the information obtained during data collection could be used to improve all children's well-being (Bless et al., 2013:29; Strydom, 2011:116). Participation in the study could also benefit the participants as they were made aware of the importance of the researcher obtaining their views. Doing something meaningful and being recognised for it are important for children in middle childhood and can contribute to their sense of mastery

(Martorell et al., 2014:395; Thomas, 2005:93). The researcher observed that the participants were excited to take part in the interviews and provide their views on child well-being.

Given that the research was conducted at a time that measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic applied, the researcher implemented the following measures to ensure the safety of the participants and the researcher:

- The researcher and the participants were required to wear protective face masks that covered their mouths and noses.
- A personal distance of two meters was maintained.
- Hands were disinfected with a suitable disinfectant when meeting the participant and during the interviews, as needed.
- The work surface was disinfected before and after each interview.
- Writing materials and the communication cards were not shared. The researcher duplicated the communication cards for each child.
- Interviews were conducted in a room with open windows, with no other people present in the immediate environment.

All the participants were aware of the need for the above measures, even though some participants complained about wearing masks. The COVID-19 measures were also stipulated in the letters of informed assent and consent.

3.3.2 Voluntary participation and informed consent and assent

As mentioned before, the principle of voluntary participation was adhered to and the participants were never forced to participate in the study (Strydom, 2011:118). The participants were informed about this principle, which also meant that they could withdraw at any time during the research process, with no negative consequences for them (Maree, 2020:48). Comprehensive information on the study and what would be expected of the participants was provided in an informed assent letter to participants (attached as Appendix C) and an informed consent letter to their parents (attached as Appendix D). This information allowed the parents and children to make an informed decision on whether to participate in the study or not. Both the informed assent and consent letters contained information on the goal and procedures of the study, what the participation will be about, and possible risks and advantages for the participants (Maree, 2020:48; Strydom, 2011:117). Permission was also asked to digitally record the interviews and the participants received information on the publication of findings and the storage of data according to the stipulations of the University of Pretoria.

The research principle of autonomy, which relates to the freedom of choice of individuals, was adhered to (Bless et al., 2013:30). Participants who were willing to participate in the study were asked to sign the assent letter, in which information was presented in an age-appropriate way as the participants in this study would be between the ages of 8 and 12 years. As the participants were minors, the parents or guardians had to provide their written informed consent for their child's participation in the study. The principles of autonomy and voluntary participation were confirmed with the participants by reading the informed assent letter with them before the data collection interviews started to ensure that the participants understood what their assent meant. All the participants as well as their parents gave their signed consent and assent to participate in the study.

3.3.3 Privacy and confidentiality

The researcher respected the ethical principle of privacy, as she allowed the participants to decide what information they were willing to discuss and share during the interviews regarding their perspectives on child well-being (Strydom, 2011:119). Awareness of researcher reactivity helped to uphold the principle of privacy during the data collection interviews (Lietz & Zayas, 2010:192). By being aware of how she could influence the participants by the way she asked questions and by affirming and non-affirming verbal and non-verbal communication during the data collection interviews, the researcher avoided that participants would feel compelled to provide a response. All the participants spontaneously provided information that they felt comfortable with.

Anonymity could not be ensured due to conducting face-to-face interviews with the participants. To uphold confidentiality, pseudonyms were used to identify participants in the research report and the interview transcripts were coded so that no other person would be able to identify a specific participant. Furthermore, it was ensured that the participants' identifying documents were only accessed by the researcher, who would thus be the only person that could link information from the data collection interviews to a particular participant (Strydom, 2011:119). All the personal information about the participants as well as the data of the study were handled with strict confidentiality (Maree, 2020:48, Strydom, 2011:119). The data of the study will be stored for 15 years at the Department of Social Work and Criminology in line with the stipulations of the University of Pretoria.

3.3.4 No deception

No deception occurred during the study. The researcher made sure that the participants and their parents received correct information about what the research was about, that no false or incorrect information were given to them, and that no information was withheld from them (Bless et al., 2013:34; Strydom, 2011:118-119). During debriefing it was confirmed with each

participant that no unintended misunderstandings occurred during the study (Strydom, 2013:119).

3.3.5 Debriefing

The participants were provided with the opportunity for debriefing at the end of each interview, where they were able to talk about how they experienced taking part in the study. Debriefing also helped the researcher to monitor whether any discomfort was experienced by the participants during their participation in the interviews (Babbie, 2017:71; Strydom, 2011:122). No discomfort or misconceptions occurred during the study. The self-concept and the sense of mastery of participant are important in middle childhood (Arnett, 2016:23; Louw & Louw, 2014a:257; Martorell et al., 2014:395). Therefore, the researcher acknowledged the value of the information gained from the participants and made sure that the participants did not leave the interview with any doubts or negative feelings about themselves based on their performance in the study (Bless et al., 2013:35). The focus of debriefing was on the participants' experience of their participation in the research and not on providing counselling to the participants (Maree, 2020:49).

3.3.6 Actions and competence of the researcher

The researcher conducting an in-depth literature study on the research topic, research methodology and research ethics so that she was well-prepared to explore the participants' views on child well-being (Strydom, 2011:123). She furthermore implemented the knowledge and skills gained during the completion of an advanced research module as part of the master's degree and engaged in discussions with her research supervisor. The research was conducted in compliance with the relevant ethical principles and guidelines for researchers (Bless et al., 2013:28-29). As a registered social worker, she acted according to the social work values which include respect for the human dignity, rights, and worth of all human beings, competence, and showing concern for the well-being of others as stated by the South African Council for Social Service Professions (1979). Respecting the rights and dignity of the participants was upheld throughout the study (Bless et al., 2013:31). In the literature review for the study, the work of other authors or researchers was properly acknowledged, and the research findings were presented truthfully (Babbie, 2017:72; Strydom, 2011:123).

3.3.7 Release or publication of findings

The purpose of the research was to present the research findings to the public in written form (Strydom, 2012:126). The participants and their parents or guardians were informed beforehand in the informed assent and consent letters that the findings of the study would be published in a written report for academic purposes and that confidentiality and anonymity

would be protected. The release of research findings is intended to contribute to existing knowledge on children's perspectives on child well-being. The research findings have been accurately presented and the research report will be available at the library of the University of Pretoria. The research report contains an accurate overview of the study, and no manipulation of the findings occurred (Babbie, 2017:72; Strydom, 2011:126). The limitations experienced during the research study are also presented in the research report.

3.3.8 Ethical permission for the study

The study was conducted as part of a group research project for the master's coursework programme (MSW Play-based Intervention) at the University of Pretoria in which individual researchers conducted separate studies on the topic. The study obtained institutional ethical approval before the research started and was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Pretoria to ensure the ethical standards of the research (Bless et al., 2013:31-32) (letter of ethical approval attached as Appendix E). The researcher upheld the ethical principles critical for conducting scientific research (Mogorosi, 2018:7).

3.4 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The empirical findings of the study are presented in this section. The biographical information and information on the household structure of the participants will firstly be provided. Subsequently, the empirical findings of the study are presented according to themes and sub-themes.

3.4.1 Section A: Biographical profile of the participants

The sample of the study comprised of 11 participants, male and female, between the ages of 8 and 12 years. Information on the participants' age, gender and school grades is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Age, gender and school grades of the participants

Participant	Gender	Age	School grade
1	Female	8 years	Grade 3
2	Female	9 years	Grade 3
3	Male	10 years	Grade 3
4	Female	9 years	Grade 3
5	Female	11 years	Grade 6
6	Female	12 years	Grade 7
7	Female	11 years	Grade 6
8	Female	8 years	Grade 3
9	Male	10 years	Grade 4
10	Male	10 years	Grade 3
11	Male	9 years	Grade 4

Seven (7) participants were female, and four (4) participants were male. The participants were fairly evenly distributed over the age group of 8 to 12 years: two (2) participants were 8 years old; three (3) participants were 9 years old; three (3) participants were 10 years old; two (2) participants were 11 years old; and one (1) participant was 12 years old. Six (6) participants were in Grade 3, two (2) participants were in Grade 4, two (2) participants were in Grade 6, and one (1) participant was in Grade 7. All the participants were in middle childhood and attending primary school. All the participants were White, which could be ascribed to the use of snowball sampling where the parent of one participant were requested to identify other potential participants for the study. All the participants lived in urban settings.

Most participants lived in a household with a mother and father where both parents contributed to the income of the household. The family structure and the members providing the income in the household are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Participants' household structure

Participant	Number of people in the household	Family members (F: father; M: mother)	Work/income
1	4	F, M, 2 children	Father, Mother
2	5	F, M, 3 children	Father, Mother
3	9	2 F, 3 M, 4 children	Father, Mother
4	6	F, M, 4 children	Father
5	3	F, M, 1 child	Father, Mother
6	3	F, M, 1 child	Father, Mother
7	6	F, M, 4 children	Father
8	6	F, M, 4 children	Father
9	5	F, M, 3 children	Father, Mother
10	4	F, M, 2 children	Father
11	3	F, M, 1 child	Father, Mother

All the participants lived with both parents, a mother and father, in their household, therefore in a nuclear family (Department of Social Development, 2021:v). Two (2) participants lived in a household of four members; two (2) participants in a household of five members; three (3) participants in a household of three family members, and three (3) participants lived in a household with six family members. One (1) participant lived in a household of 9 members, consisting of family members as well as family friends. Three (3) participants were only children living in the family, while two (2) were two children, two (2) were three children, and four (4) participants were four children living in the household.

All the participants' fathers worked full time; while seven (7) participants' mothers also worked and four (4) of the eleven mothers did not work. The participants' families did not experience adverse socio-economic conditions such as unemployment or poor housing. In 2018, 70% of South African children lived with at least one adult who is employed, with the unemployment rate of women (41.2%) higher than that of men (33.9%). This could be because women are seen as the primary caregivers of children who provide care for the child (Hall, 2019a:223).

3.4.2 Section B: Qualitative research findings

The findings of the study are presented in this section and discussed according to the themes and sub-themes that were identified from the data, summarised in Table 3.

Table 3: Themes and sub-themes in the qualitative findings

Main themes	Sub-themes
1. Indicators of child well-being	1.1 The child will be happy 1.2 The child being healthy 1.3 Well-being means being cared for 1.4 Being successful enhances well-being 1.5 Children who feel loved
2. The family members needed in a child's life	2.1 Being part of a family 2.2 The importance of parents for children's well-being 2.3 Relationship with the extended family 2.4 Spending quality time with grandparents 2.5 Siblings' involvement in children's lives 2.6 Children need pets in their lives
3. Other important people in the child's microsystem	3.1 A child needs the support of a teacher 3.2 Friendships and the support of friends
4. Having children's basic needs met	4.1 Food is important for children's well-being 4.2 Children need clean, drinkable water 4.3 Children need appropriate clothes to live well 4.4 Participation in sport can help children live well 4.5 Having a home to live in
5. Resources in the immediate environment	5.1 Children need books to read 5.2 Having proper sanitation and bathroom facilities 5.3 Access to transport 5.4 Having electronic devices 5.5 The importance of having electricity 5.6 Having toys to play with
6. Access to services and places in the child's community	6.1 Having access to shops 6.2 Medical and healthcare services and facilities 6.3 Having access to a school 6.4 Access to a church 6.5 Outside park, playground or play area 6.6 There must be fire stations to protect children against fires
7. The quality of the environment in which children live	7.1 Children need a clean environment with no pollution 7.2 No water pollution 7.3 No air pollution
8. How children can be involved in their own well-being	8.1 Supporting the well-being of others 8.2 Children can take actions to enhance their own well-being 8.3 Children can help to keep the environment clean
9. How parents can include children in enhancing child well-being	9.1 Teach and guide children to be more independent 9.2 Help children to experience a sense of accomplishment

The above themes and sub-themes are discussed subsequently and supported by direct quotes from the interviews and integration of literature.

3.4.2.1 Theme 1: Indicators of child well-being

The research findings indicate that the participants had specific views of when it is going well with a child. All the participants mentioned that being happy indicates that a child is doing well. Some participants mentioned aspects such as being healthy, cared for, successful and loved as indicators of well-being in children. These aspects are discussed in the sub-themes in this section.

Sub-theme 1.1: The child will be happy

All the participants spontaneously answered that a child who lives well will be happy. The participants also expanded on different factors that will make the child happy and how a child would look when the child is happy.

“He is happy at his home, and he has a happy life. He has a friendly face and a smile on his face. They always want to play, and they are always happy.” (P2)

“When she is very happy in her face ... You will see in her face that she wants to talk to everyone, and she wants to play with everyone. He will play with you, and he will say ‘yes’ to anything that you would like to do.” (P5)

“She is usually friendly with everyone, and she is friendly and does not try to look smart. ... I will say if they do not have many problems at school, meaning they do have friends at school and they do not struggle with anything.” (P7)

“He will be happy. He will laugh. ... When his father buys him presents, happy ... to have friends, to have a mother and father.” (P10)

All the participants regarded being happy as an indicator of child well-being. The participants elaborated on it when asked what is meant with happiness. As mentioned by the participants, being happy can range from having a smile on one's face, to laughing, playing with friends and to receiving a gift. The participants' views that being happy is a main indicator for child well-being is underlined in the literature. Well-being can be explained as the quality of life of people (Brockeveld et al., 2019:589). Well-being can also be explained in terms of the child's preferred feelings and experiences, the balance of positive and negative emotions, and/or positive emotions alone (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014:1; Huppert, 2014:1). Subjective indicators of well-being relate to the individual's perspective of happiness (King et al., 2014:682-283; Statham & Chase, 2010:2). The word ‘well’ means the state of an individual's true happiness which provides the individual with a meaning of life (Mag, 2015:1396). Well-being can also be explained as a basic human goal where children have a wish for a life to go well. Life that goes well comprises of both functioning well and feeling good (Huppert, 2014:1). As evident in the participants' views, a child who experiences a state of well-being can socialize and enjoy the company of other people, is more energetic, and shows more generosity and cooperation (Mag, 2015:1396). Furthermore, being happy could lead to the enhancement of the child's

self-esteem and self-confidence, which will benefit the child, the child's family, community, school, and the wider society (Mag, 2015:1396).

Some of the participants indicated different factors that make children unhappy and also described how a child will look when a child is not happy.

"It means being angry (the participant is silent; crosses her arms and shows an angry expression on her face) ... when he gets punished and gets a hiding or the teacher punished him." (P1)

"He is always angry and has an unhappy face ... If someone in his house is angry and rude to him. If the teacher and friends at school are not nice to him." (P2)

"Mmm ... when her parents argue, and her friends argue with her or bully her. When the father hits the mother, and they argue only about finances ... (The child will feel) very sad." (P5)

"If you see he reacts angry with friends then there is something wrong in his life. That is bad. I think children would become negative. Maybe their brother or sister does not care about them or maybe their parents, or their grandmother and grandfather are deceased and then they stay in a children's home and then it is difficult for them or maybe it is a child that went to the hostel and misses his parents." (P8)

All the participants clarified how a child would look when the child is unhappy and could explain relevant reasons why children would be unhappy. Children in middle childhood – the age group of the participants – can understand their emotions, they can talk about their emotions, can identify circumstances that lead to positive and negative emotions, and they have a clear understanding that more than one emotion can be experienced in an event (Berk, 2013:415-416; Louw & Louw, 2014a:259). Huppert (2014:1) suggests that feeling good most of the time would not be helpful to the well-being of the child as it excludes negative emotion that are normally felt in distressing situations.

Sub-theme 1.2: The child being healthy

Most participants answered that a child who experiences a sense of well-being will be healthy and indicated different factors that will make a child healthy.

"He is healthy and not sick, and he does not feel sick, and he is very happy." (P2)

"Like you do not have to be sad (because) of being sick and you will feel happy and be loved. Mmm ... he needs to care for himself and drink vitamins and drink enough water and play outside." (P6)

"... this one, to be healthy. He is healthy. He eats his vegetables every night and practices rugby. He looks very happy. His body will look healthy, and he will look strong. You must eat your vegetables and fruit every day and drink clean water. But nothing like eating sweets and unhealthy food late at night, and also not during school time as you will not feel good." (P11)

Some participants described what an unhealthy child will look like and expressed the following views:

“He looks sad and very angry. There was a boy with me in Grade 1 ... he felt sick, maybe something in his house was not good at that moment or he stays at home alone.” (P1)

“They feel sick and do not feel well.” (P2)

“He will be sick.” (P10)

“He does not feel very well and will feel sick.” (P11)

Being healthy was seen as an indicator of child well-being and the participants described aspects that would keep children healthy and the effects on children who are not healthy. Children’s health is a key indicator of child well-being and highlighted in the literature and is described as an individual’s ability to live a healthy life (Western & Tomaszewski, 2016:1). Physical well-being relates to factors such as the absence of any illness and experiencing adequate functioning on a physical level. As one of the domains of subjective well-being, good physical health is a protective factor as it decreases the risk for chronic physical illness and supports longevity (Steptoe et al., 2015:641).

From the views of the participants, it is evident that a child’s state of health can be determined by looking at children’s behaviour or their appearance. Well-being is a multidimensional concept, and one aspect of well-being can influence other aspects thereof (Minkinen, 2013:550; Newland et al., 2019:395); which means that children’s physical well-being or health can be affected by other aspects, for example their home circumstances. This influence was suggested by Participant 1. Children’s genetics can also have a substantial influence on their physical well-being (Minkinen, 2013:550). Well-being thus indicates that both objective and subjective well-being needs must be fulfilled for any person to experience good overall health (Naidoo & Muthukrishna, 2016:8).

Sub-theme 1.3: Well-being means being cared for

The participants viewed being cared for as a sign of child well-being. They explained factors that would indicate that children are cared for.

“Someone who cares for you like your mother, teacher and friends. They talk to you, and they are friendly to you, and they love you.” (P2)

“When I get hurt, I will tell my mother or father. If I stepped in something or if I ate something that I should not have eaten, they give me medication and they help me. They make me healthy (and therefore) happy.” (P4)

“The mother and the father ... care for the child and the child receives very good marks. It does not matter if it is 12 o’clock at night, the parents will sit and help their child.” (P5)

“There can be Jesus who cares about people or other family members can help ... Friends can do it, a teacher or even people who see this child on the streets can care for them. They will help them. Let’s say there is a child that does not know where his mother is or when his mother will pick him up at school, then your mother can call the number and say that your child does not know where you are. And children that do not have food, you can help them at school or maybe if they do not have a house, a homeless child, or their mother or father is deceased and they cannot go alone to a children’s home, then you can maybe help them or adopt them or take them to a children’s home. I think their hearts will feel warm.” (P8)

The participants who viewed this aspect as an indicator for child well-being, mentioned that being cared for can range from a child who receives love to one who is helped by others such as the child’s mother and father, which will result in the child experiencing happiness. Minkkinen (2013:551) states that social well-being refers to supportive social circumstances and positive relationships between the child and important people in the child’s life. Because children are a vulnerable group, they depend on their parents for their care. Therefore, poor caregiving can be harmful to a child’s physical and emotional well-being (Fattore & Mason, 2017:285).

The influence on children’s emotional well-being when they are not cared for was noted by some participants.

“He will feel very sad ... because he does not receive any love like the love he should have received.” (P5)

“Then he will feel that he is not special and not important.” (P8)

The two participants’ views indicate that not getting adequate care will negatively affect a child’s emotions and self-esteem. Thomas (2005:93) indicates that children who do not receive sufficient support cannot develop their existing potential for reaching their age-appropriate potential. A lack of proper and loving care can thus affect a person’s well-being during childhood but also their future well-being, which will affect a sustainable future that is characterised by dignity and social inclusion as stated in the Global Education Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2016). Parents, teachers, and government must therefore be committed to enhancing children’s well-being (Mag, 2015:1394). Section 150(1) of the Children’s Act 38 of 2005 emphasizes that children need care and protection when they experience circumstances that may have an impact on their well-being.

Sub-theme 1.4: Being successful enhances well-being

The participants indicated being successful as an important aspect of child well-being. They described how a child will feel when the child is successful and factors that make a feel child successful.

“I think if you have helped someone, then you can feel successful. ... (A child who feels successful will be) very happy.” (P2)

“You are definitely more successful if you try something rather to say that you will never get it right. And if you want to be successful, then you need to go on and not give up. ... I did not like to run ... then my mother asked me to do a race and I did well, then I definitely felt more that I can actually do it.” (P7)

“Let’s say that you write four spelling tests, and you have 40 out of 40, then it means that you are successful. If you made the team in rugby or tennis, then you are successful and you feel good.” (P11)

The participants felt that being successful can enhance children’s well-being as it means that they have achieved something meaningful that makes them feel good and happy. Children can feel successful if they achieve a goal and succeed in different tasks, but also by doing something for someone else. Huppert (2014:27) states that subjective well-being is enhanced when a sense of progression towards goals is noticed, when goals are motivated, and the goal is compatible with the person’s unique values. Children in middle childhood, like the participants, enjoy doing tasks that they see as meaningful and seek to be acknowledged for completing these tasks (Martorell et al., 2014:395; Thomas, 2005:93). Parents and the child’s family play an important role in providing children with opportunities for success (Louw & Louw, 2014a:229). When children are given a task and the opportunity to achieve and receive appropriate support from parents or other adults, they have a better chance to experience a sense of mastery (Arnett, 2016:23; Martorell et al., 2014:395; Thomas, 2005:93). Mastery can be linked to children’s self-esteem and self-efficacy, which can enhance their resilience to deal better with adverse conditions (Beyond Blue Ltd., 2017:10; Louw & Louw, 2014b:432-433; Naidoo & Muthukrishna, 2016:6). Positive experiences in which they master meaningful tasks can make children feel successful and thus contribute to children’s well-being.

Sub-theme 1.5: Children who feel loved

The participants indicated that being loved by important people in one’s life is an important indicator of child well-being as being loved would make them feel happy. They furthermore explained how adults should show love to children.

“Love and that everyone cares for them. ... A mother and father should be nice to them and a teacher and friends as well.” (P2)

“To be loved (will make a child feel) very happy.” (P4)

“They (parents) give children food and help them with work. They will not be ugly and angry with someone. And when they did something wrong, they will tell the other person that they are sorry about what they have done or have said. (The child will be) happy.” (P5)

“So that they will help him when he struggles or when he is sad or got hurt, then the mother can put on the plaster (and the child will be) very happy.” (P9)

The participants described that to be loved comes in different forms, for example receiving a hug, giving a smile, being nice to the child, and to be cared for by parents. Some participants explained how a child will feel when the child is not loved.

“Otherwise, if they do not get it, he will always be scared and feel sad. He will feel scared if other people do not give him love, then he will think that everyone will not care for him. He will feel very sad.” (P2)

“He will feel very unhappy, and he will not feel love from anyone.” (P6)

It is evident from the research findings that being loved is an important indicator for child well-being and that children need to receive love from others for them to live well and feel good. Not feeling loved will lead to negative emotions in children and a perception that no-one will care for or about them. The experience of not being loved will thus have a negative effect on children’s mental well-being, which refers to emotional well-being and a positive mental state (Nahkur & Kutsar, 2019:354). Children depend on the love and affection of their parents (Fattore & Mason, 2017:285). Parents have a legal responsibility to take care of their child’s well-being, and when children experience parental love, they understand that they are important, accepted, protected and cared for (Aleksiejuk, 2015:162; Mag, 2015:1394).

3.4.2.2 Theme 2: The family members needed in a child’s life

A strong relationship between social well-being and social support has been found, where the development of one aspect gives rise to the growth in the other (Rahdarzadeh & Adibisedeh, 2016:194). In addition, individuals are the outcome of the social environment they live in and the relationships they come across. The research findings indicate that the relationships a child has within the family system, especially the relationships with parents, and with other role players in the microsystem help a child to live well and feel good. The research findings indicate that the participants had specific views of who should be in a child’s life for a child to live well. These role players are discussed in the sub-themes in this section.

- **Sub-theme 2.1: Being part of a family**

Some participants indicated that a child needs a family to live well and to feel good. With regards to the family, the value of spending time together, the family relationships and the characteristics of family members became clear in this study. Some participants mentioned the following:

“Mommy, daddy and my sister. ... My mother is very friendly to me and sometimes after school she will ask me if I want to go ... and eat something. ... My father is also very friendly to me, and he usually takes us to get some ice-cream when we drive with him ... My sister is also very friendly to me. Each time she and my mother fetch me at school, she runs to me and gives me a big hug. We usually play teacher-teacher.” (P1)

“Your family, they help each other. They talk together, braai together, they will say to him what to do next time, because then they can get to know them.” (P9)

“Children must have a family. It has a mom, dad, brother and sisters, brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law ... It is your mother, father and brother ... My father has white hair; my mother and brother have brown hair and my sisters have black hair. ... and they love you very much.” (P11)

The participants indicated that a family is needed in a child's life for a child to live well and that the family would consist of a mother, father, and siblings who are friendly, helping each other, doing things together and loving each other. The participants' descriptions fits with the nuclear family, which consists of a mother, father and their biological and/or adopted children (Department of Social Development, 2021:v). The immediate family is the microsystem that has the most influence on children's development and functioning (Louw et al., 2014:29). Families are crucial support systems in a child's life and can provide children with the reassurance of safe and positive relationships between the child and the whole family as well as a sense of happiness, friendliness, peace, comfort, a sense of belonging, trust, respect and care (Fattore & Mason, 2017:278-279; Sirkandi, 2020:340). When the family atmosphere is pleasant and healthy, the child will in general experience better socio-emotional health. It is evident that family members play an important role in the development and well-being of a child as a conducive family environment has a positive influence on a child and can thus be a protective factor that enhances children's well-being (Louw & Louw, 2014a:299; Rees & Main, 2015:1-153).

- **Sub-theme 2.2: The importance of parents for children's well-being**

Almost all the participants indicated spontaneously that a child needs a mother and a father to live well and to feel good. The participants described the importance of parental care and parents' engagement in children's lives as well as characteristics that parents should have.

“You need a mother and a father to feel good ... They will be very happy and friendly, and they help each other, and they do not argue.” (P1)

“A mother and father (who are) always happy and nice to the child. ...they need to be friendly and play with the child and talk with the child.” (P2)

“A mother and father ... the mother has very good manners and if the daughter or son needs something, with the last bit of their money they will give to the children. They will help their children and buy them clothes and not let them walk around in dirty and old clothes. The mother helps where she can. The father has a very good job, and he must be able to take care of the mother and child. He is the man of the house.” (P5)

“(Having both parents) will be nice for him. Say your mother needs to be at an appointment for a long time, then you know your father is there, he is also family, and you get to see him often as he needs to work from day to night. But it is better for me if it is both, because they both give you good lessons and sometimes the mother cannot do things. There are things that the mother can do and the father not and things that the father can do, and the mother cannot do.

... it is better if both are there, but it can also be one.” (P8)

“Very happy. Then one parent can take and fetch the child at rugby, while the other one can watch the child play rugby and the other one can take and fetch the child at school. I see them every day and I see every day how much they love me.” (P11)

The participants highlighted the importance of parents in children’s lives and indicated that parents should have positive characteristics such as being happy, friendly, helping each other and the child, and take care of the child. The well-being of a child is the parent’s legal responsibility, and parents need to show dedication to enhancing the well-being of children (Mag, 2015:1394). Positive relationships with parents have a positive influence on the well-being of children (Brown et al., 2015:177; Henderson & Thompson, 2016:43). Parents are the most important support system in children’s lives. Children rely on and learn from their mothers and fathers from birth. Parents take on the role to care and protect children and chart a trajectory that encourages children’s well-being (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, 2016:15).

Most of the participants had positive views on living with both parents (a mother and father), which is in support of literature on the matter. Collaboration between a wife and husband is important for family harmony (Sirkandi, 2020:340). A child’s mother and father are not comparable in terms of their parenting, and children need both parents to contribute to their development (Gežová, 2015:46). Especially for children in the pre-school age group, the presence of both parents helps the child to take on social roles within and apart from the family. Both parents are needed by the child, especially due to gender differences and the mental selfhood of a woman and man (Gežová, 2015:47).

Nowadays many children experience living with only one parent in a household, either a mother or a father (Department of Social Development, 2021:151). The participants expressed the following views on living with only one parent:

“Very sad. ... The mommy is probably poor, and the child gets home-school maybe. ... I think the mother takes better care of the child, feed him proper food ... And she does not leave the child alone at the house.” (P1)

“Sad ... (A child will prefer to live with the) mother, because the mother can care for the child and protect him very well.” (P4)

“To be honest, I will think that it will be very sad to them. If he plays at his friend’s house and he sees his friend talking to his mother and father, then he can feel sad because he does not have both. A mother (will be a better single parent) because ... a mother always helps. A mother can get a job and care (for the children).” (P5)

“Not very happy, but he will feel sad now and then. ... a mother, because she teaches him what to do and what he will use in life and how to be neat and how to sort things.” (P6)

One participant indicated that a father should be the single parent taking care of the child, stating the following:

“I think that a father is better, because I will say, he can do more things ... I think it is better if you are a boy to have a father.” (P7)

Almost all the participants suggested that a child will feel sad and unhappy to live with only one parent, and that a mother is likely to be the primary caregiver of the child living in a single-parent household. The findings of the study are evident in literature indicating that the well-being of children is influenced by single-parent households (Patel, 2015:200; Richter & Dawes, 2008:86; Richter et al., 2012:3). A child who is brought up by a single parent, either with only a mother or a father, lacks the ‘second half’ of the parent system, which can lead to personal problems or a disorganised life (Štrbová, 2004 in Gežová, 2015:47). A mother’s care is mostly characterised by kindness, generosity, tenderness, and love (Gežová, 2015:50).

In terms of absent fathers, it is recognised that a good relation between the child and a father and the involvement of the father in the child’s life in terms of being there for the child, attending functions at school and helping the child, have a positive impact on the emotional climate of the child’s living environment (Adamsons & Johnson, 2013:590). The role of the father is important for both boys and girls (Gežová, 2015:48). A father is important to children as the father is an example for his son and is idealised by his daughter (Štrbová, 2004 in Gežová, 2015:48). Children whose fathers are involved in their lives, tend to show better psycho-social well-being, higher academic achievement, and better chances in life (Department of Social Development, 2013b:24); which can contribute to sustainable futures.

The participants also mentioned the tasks that parents should undertake to help a child to live well. They expressed the following views:

“They help him with schoolwork, and they show him things that are good, and they help him to eat healthy and to live healthy.” (P4)

“If they want their children to be nice, they should teach them discipline and teach them to be friendly and care for the child. I should say they should give more attention to their children as their work, because there will always be work, but your child will not always be there.” (P5)

“The mother and father need to care for him (the child) and be happy with him. If they go somewhere or if they go outside and spend time together, the mother and father need to understand him and smile with him and value things with him.” (P6)

“They usually help a child when there is a problem. ...to have parents who listen and who help you to do something.” (P7)

The findings of the study indicate that parents have the responsibility to care for the child, to educate the child, teach the child discipline and spend time with the child. Parents need to cherish, nurture, and do their best for their children (Sirkandi, 2020:340). Parenting is affected by the environment and culture, which will influence their views in caring for and guiding their children (Sirkandi, 2020:340). In this regard, the ecological systems theory notes that culture and value systems are found in the macro system. Being the system in which all the other systems are embedded, the macro system has a significant influence on children (Louw et al., 2014:29-30).

Parents are also important to educate their children from birth to adulthood. Specific tasks are generally assigned to the mother and/or the father (Sirkandi, 2020:339). However, households consisting of the nuclear family have decreased over the last decades (Department of Social Development, 2013b:16). Single parent households are most often headed by women and are at higher risk of experiencing financial hardships (Department of Social Development, 2013b:19). This aspect was mentioned by Participant 1 above and indicates that single parent households can affect children's material well-being such as their living environment and proper nutrition (Minkkinen, 2013:551).

- **Sub-theme 2.3: Relationship with the extended family**

Some participants explained that uncles, aunts, nephews, and nieces are needed in a child's life. These family members are considered the extended family, who is defined as a "multigenerational family that may or may not share the same household" (Department of Social Development, 2021:iv). The participants described the reasons for these family members being important for children's well-being as well as the characteristics that they must have to contribute to children's well-being.

"Uncles and aunts, they are also very friendly to you, and they talk to you; you can have a lot or not that many uncles and aunts. And they are very friendly to you and your uncles always make jokes with you. You can also go visit your uncles and aunts and talk to them and to ask them things if other members of the family do not have an answer for you. Your nephews and nieces, they always make jokes with you, and they play with you, and you can also go visit them." (P2)

"Nephews and nieces grow up with you and you have a good relationship. You share special moments and enjoy playing together and talking to each other. ... A nephew helps you and you can talk to your niece about something that you do not want to talk to your sister about. An aunt is so funny, and an uncle will do weird things and is also very funny. An aunt ... she is always there if you want a spa day or if you want to talk about boys, then she will be there to listen to you." (P5)

"My aunt ... takes pictures and help me with stuff ... and my nephew as well and my uncle (child smiles) ... they (children) should just be happy together with them (extended family members). An older nephew is always the best, because he can

also help you with things, say if you struggle with something, then he is always a little bit older to help you with your homework.” (P6)

“Uncles and aunts. They help you and your family with anything they need help with. Like helping your sisters at their kindergarten school. They (children) also need uncles and aunts. ... Every child needs an uncle and aunt.” (P11)

One participant mentioned how a child will feel when he or she does not have extended family members. The participant stated the following:

“They will feel that other children are happy to have uncles and aunts. ... they will feel that they are unlucky that they do not have nieces and nephews.” (P2)

The research findings show that members of the extended family can help children to live well and feel good. The participants mentioned different reasons why the extended family is important for children’s well-being, often related to being friendly to the child, helping the child in different ways, while the child can also visit them and talk to them. In literature the extended family is described as family forming important relationships with individuals, who encourage and support the individual and enhance the individual’s resilience (Walsh, 2012 in Jansen, 2017:9). Extended family members are important as children learn by observing the family members’ behaviour (Jansen, 2017:1).

The extended family can be a source of additional support for children who live with their parents; however, children can also live in a household beyond the nuclear family, for example with an aunt, uncle, grandparents, or other relatives. Extended family members contribute to household resources such as transportation, food, or money; however, can sometimes put extra strain on these resources. The extended family also nurtures, assists and supports children, or even provides childcare by raising a child or acting as a co-parent in a parent’s absence (Cross, 2018:2). The Department of Social Development (2021:29) therefore recommends that family strengthening programmes to empower families must include the whole family, including members of the extended family. Support by informal systems in the child’s environment, such as friends and extended family, refers to the role that the exosystem can play in enhancing children’s well-being (Berk, 2013:28; Louw et al., 2014:29).

- **Sub-theme 2.4: Spending quality time with grandparents**

The participants believed that a grandmother and grandfather are important people in a child’s life. They mentioned different situations which will have a positive influence on a child’s life when spending time with grandparents.

“Your grandmother and grandfather surprise you a lot. They take you on holidays without your mother and father paying anything and they help other family members, like babysitting their little babies. ... and they are married.” (P1)

“A grandmother and grandfather, they spoil you and they are also friendly and buy you gifts. ...they (children) can visit their grandmother and grandfather and talk to them and learn stuff about them.” (P2)

“A grandmother and grandfather. They help us and they protect us and sometimes they give us food.” (P4)

“Grandmother and grandfather. I think it is important to make them (children) aware of the life before, how they struggled and if this happened to them, this is how they handled it. And the grandmother is just there for the children to do things with them and to keep them happy and the grandfather is just with the boys.” (P8)

“His grandmother and grandfather. (They) talk to them, they tell him about the past and they tell him about very old things that we do not know as we were not there many years ago.” (P9)

Some of the participants indicated how a child will feel when a child does not have grandparents.

“He will not get a lot of attention as what he would get if he had a grandmother and grandfather.” (P6)

“Very sad, because if he was small and he did not have a grandmother or grandfather, then he would never learn about who his grandmother and grandfather is.” (P9)

Most of the participants described grandparents as being friendly to the child and contributing to the well-being of the child by helping the child and the family, spoiling the child, and teaching and sharing their experiences of the past. The findings of the study, indicating that the participants saw grandparents in a positive light, are also found in the literature. Grandparents transfer their knowledge, experiences, values, and traditions to their grandchildren. Studies show that a high level of grandparents' involvement play an important role in child well-being, and the protection of that family relationship may be in the child's best interest (Holdgaard, 2021:1). Grandparents take on the role of helping the parents with caregiving tasks such as fetching the child from school and caring for the child when he or she is ill or during school holidays (Holdgaard, 2021:6). They can furthermore serve as role models to children and encourage academic or other successes, discuss appropriate behaviour, provide emotional support and advice, and help children with homework (Dunifon & Bajracharya, 2012:5). However, the White Paper on Families in South Africa (Department of Social Development, 2013b:20) notes that grandparents who assume the role of primary caregivers of children may be faced with challenges, for example poor health and limited finances, which may lead to socio-emotional problems in children.

- **Sub-theme 2.5: Siblings' involvement in children's lives.**

The participants answered spontaneously that siblings are needed in a child's life to aid a child's well-being and explained how siblings could contribute to children living well.

"A brother. A sister. The brother always stands up for his brother and protects him. ... brothers look out for each other. A sister should always be with you when you are small ... and feed you when your mother and father is not there." (P3)

"A brother and sister, because children who do not have a brother and sister cannot play with someone. ... a brother is very lovable and sometimes a bit irritating. They have a close relationship with each other and that is how the relationship must be. Brothers and sisters do argue but that is normal. A brother should always be there for you. When a boy does not treat you right, then he should help you. A sister should teach you about the future and what will happen." (P5)

"They keep you busy, and they can take care of you, and they can help you to become responsible and they play with you and sometimes when they have friends, they are not nice with you, but later they want to play hide and seek, and they need one more person and ask if you can play with. ... Or maybe if you are very small, then they help you like your mother and father to put you to sleep, like reading a book to you if you have nothing else to do, and it is just nice for children as they are not your mother and father, but your brother and sister and most of the time they want nothing to do with you." (P8)

"Your sister and brother, they are very friendly, and they like to play with you and when they are bigger, they can tell you what will come in the high school or primary school ... (Without them) he will be unhappy; he will not be able to play with them. He will not be able to talk to them or to tell jokes together." (P9)

Most of the participants mentioned that siblings must be in a child's life for a child to live well. They ascribed siblings as mostly having positive characteristics; siblings are friendly, play with the child, take care of the child and help the child, they love each other and sometimes take on the role of the parents. Siblings do argue at times, but it is seen as normal. The participants ascribed gender roles to siblings: brothers should be there for the child and stand up and protect the child while sisters look after the child and teach the child about the future. The fact that siblings are important for the well-being of children is highlighted in the literature. Generally, siblings play an important role in human development (Szymańska, 2020). Older sisters and brothers take on the role of caretaker, role model or teacher to younger siblings (Hou et al., 2022:2).

Playing, spending time with siblings, experiencing difficult circumstances together, and learning together, help children to enhance their self-control and social competence; in addition, observing the reactions of siblings enhances children's emotional skills (Szymańska, 2020). As also evident in the research findings, the interactions between siblings are reciprocal, such as conflict between siblings and siblings who play together, and supportive, such as siblings taking on the role of a caregiving or teacher (Hou et al., 2022:2). The nature

of the relationships between siblings can result in positive interactions, for example closeness and warmth, and in negative interactions, for example aggression and conflict among siblings (Louw & Louw, 2014a:272). Positive interactions between siblings comprise of a range of behaviours such as comforting, sharing, timely responses, aiding, and social pretend play between siblings (Hou et al., 2022:2). According to the research findings and literature, siblings and their involvement in children's lives are important supportive factors for child well-being.

- **Sub-theme 2.6: Children need pets in their lives**

Some participants answered that a child needs pets to live well and feel good. They described different ways in which pets could contribute to children's well-being.

"Pets ... I can never live without animals. They are my favourite. When my mother and father take an afternoon nap, then I usually play with my pets and cuddle with my cat. And it is so nice when I watch television and she come to cuddle with me. Always when I am sad and cry, they usually will come to me and lay with me. (Children must have pets) so that the dogs have a house and that the dogs can comfort them when they are sad. Also, to protect the children if a burglar comes into their house." (P1)

"We should always protect our animals. ...because if the dog dies, then the boys will cry. They protect you in the night and during the day." (P3)

"The pets can give love to them, and the children can give them love, and to have a pet make you feel less lonely. It does not have to be many; it can be one or two (pets)." (P6)

"Animals so that you can play with them. He (the child) plays with him; he can teach him tricks; grow up with him and they can sleep with you ... If there is a burglar, then the dog can bark and then the mother or father wakes up and they can go have a look." (P9)

The participants indicated that pets are needed in children's lives as pets listen to children, and the pet can protect the child, comfort the child, and make the child feel better and feel happy. Some of the participants also highlighted that a pet gives love to the child. Animals can play a significant role in people's lives. Children growing up in a home with pets show an eagerness to directly participate in caring for the pets through actions such as grooming the pet, talking to the pet, and feeding the pet (Born, 2018:48). Talking to animals is one of the most common behaviours that children engage in, which indicates the child's desire to talk and communicate. Pets can be accepting, honest, affectionate, consistent, and loyal and whenever a child feels isolated and without support, the pet can assist in reducing the loneliness experienced by the child (Biswas, 2019:1). To take care of a pet offers a child immense joy and the love and the presence of a pet at home can help provide a sense of security for the child. Furthermore, exercise, like walking or playing with pets, has many advantages for the child's physical and mental well-being.

One participant mentioned that pets can feel emotions and react to the emotions of the child.

“They say that a dog is a man's best friend ... a dog feels emotions. When you are really sad, then the dog will feel it and will make you feel better. The person and the dog grow up together and when someone tries to hurt the child, then the dog will attack him. They are best friends, and a dog is very loveable.” (P5)

The above view is supported by literature. Pets can be a source of comfort for children. Pets give children's well-being a boost and show unconditional love (Biswas, 2019:002). Two participants indicated the importance of pets in children's lives, as having a pet provides the child with a sense of responsibility which will benefit the child in future.

“To know how to take care of a pet if you want animals someday or if you want to become a vet.” (P6)

“It can help someone to be more responsible and sometimes it helps them with parenting, and it makes them feel positive.” (P8)

The value that pets could add to children's lives, as suggested by the participants in the study, is also described in the literature. Animals provide entertainment, companionship, and the opportunity for children to learn about responsibility, and are often seen as part of the family members (Severson, 2014:26, 28). With any pet comes great responsibility. When a child has a pet, he will not feel alone and will often assume the responsibility of looking after the pet (Biswas, 2019:2). Taking care of a pet and succeeding in it confirms to children that they can take care of a living creature other than themselves. This responsibility motivates a child and gives him or her a sense of purpose which supports the well-being, mental health, and self-esteem of the child (Biswas, 2019:2). Furthermore, children in middle childhood feel positive about themselves if they take part in meaningful activities (Martorell et al., 2014:395; Thomas, 2005:93). It is evident that all the advantages of having pets mentioned by the participants can be related to enhancing children's mental and social well-being, which refers to positive emotional states and positive relationships, respectively (Minkkinen, 2013:551; Nahkur & Kutsar, 2019:354).

3.4.2.3 Theme 3: Other important people in the child's microsystem

Besides the immediate and extended family members needed in a child's life, the participants also mentioned other important people in the microsystem that are needed in a child's life for the child to live well. They indicated teachers and friends as important role players who can provide support to the child and contribute to children's well-being. These aspects are discussed in the sub-themes below.

- **Sub-theme 3.1: A child needs the support of a teacher**

All the participants spontaneously mentioned that children need a teacher to support them to do well in school and feel well. Supportive teachers must have certain characteristics and should support a child in different ways.

“A teacher ... She teaches him well and she does not shout at the child. ... She must not shout on the child if the child does not get something right.” (P2)

“A teacher helps you with work and she teaches you. And when you feel unsafe at school, you can go and talk to the teacher. (A teacher is) friendly, she has a good heart, and she also knows what is right and wrong. If you struggle with something, then you should ask the teacher and she will help you ... with Mathematics or English.” (P5)

“Teacher ... (must be) very friendly with the child and laugh with the children and learn with them. The teacher can give them things to learn that they have not learned, and it will make them feel good to learn about something they did not know.” (P6)

“Teacher...she teaches you and maybe there are children that are not appreciated, and you feel appreciated that you can learn. The teacher teaches you and she has all of this patience because she needs to deal with all of these naughty children. And when he is sick and he tells his teacher, then she sends him home. She needs to stay until the end of the day. ... but sometimes the teacher is here, and she does not care about you. It depends on how the teacher is.” (P8)

The participants mentioned that a teacher who contributes to children’s well-being should be friendly towards the child, happy, and patient, always be available, open to talk to and not yell at the child. The teacher must provide support and teach children new things. In the literature, it is confirmed that teachers play an essential role in children’s lives by providing them with the skills and knowledge required for life and for a career. Children expect a teacher to be patient, confident, innovative, and professional, having a sense of humour, knowledge of different subjects and teaching methods, and good communications skills (Clement & Rencewigg, 2020:365; Mag, 2015:1394). For a teacher to teach successfully, she needs to portray positive beliefs and behaviour and a personality which demonstrates warmth and have knowledge on different subjects (Clement & Rencewigg, 2020:365). The teacher must be sensitive and available to show support to the child by observing the child and appropriately and promptly acting to the child’s needs (Singer et al., 2013:3).

Some participants stated what the consequence will be when a teacher is not friendly and shouts at a child.

“He will be afraid to go to school.” (P2)

“They feel sad, and they will not become smart.” (P1)

“They will be dumb.” (P10)

The research findings indicate that, just as a teacher can play a supportive role to enhance children's well-being, teachers can also have a negative influence on children. Negative characteristics of a teacher are considered as a teacher who is arrogant, aggressive, and short-tempered (Clement & Rencewigg, 2020:365). Teachers are seen as people who must be committed to promoting the well-being of children (Mag, 2015:1394). It has been found that children who are more engaged in their school tend to show higher school performance, health, and well-being (Buck et al., 2018:1256). As explained by the participants above, children who do not have a teachers' support may miss the opportunity to learn new skills and knowledge which could have had benefits for the child's development and future. It is evident that a teacher is an important support system in terms of enhancing children's current well-being and also sustainable futures for children.

Sub-theme 3.2: Friendship and support from friends

Most of the participants believed that a child needs friends to live well. The participants elaborated on the characteristics that a friend should have and different ways in which friends could contribute to the well-being of a child.

"Friends ... at school, at my house and in town and at my grandmother." (P3)

"Your friends will always help you and when you are in a fight, they will know what is right and wrong and they will not lie just because you are friends with them. They laugh with you, and they do things with you. We play together or we just talk and catch up with each other. (Children need) many friends ... seven friends (participant smiles)." (P5)

"A best friend can teach you more lessons and can help you and support you. ... if there is a bully in the school, then he can go and tell someone (a friend) that someone is being mean to you." (P6)

"So, you play with your friends at school every day and you see your friends in class. They help you when you get hurt and they play with you." (P11)

The participants explained that friends must be friendly and happy to support, comfort and help a child whenever needed, for example when the child got hurt or has been bullied. Playing together, talking, and laughing together with friends were common activities that friends enjoy together at home, at school and in their neighbourhood. It can be concluded that friends who are seen as helpful and supportive become networks of perceived social care and support. The role of friends in relation to children's well-being is highlighted in literature and positive friendships are associated with child well-being (Holder & Coleman, 2015:81). Friends provide each other with support to manage the different adjustments and transitions that a child faces in daily life (Hartup, 1996 in Rogers, 2012:487). Preschool children view their friends and friendships as the sharing of ideas and interest and sources of mutual support and affection, and as children grow, they place more emphasis on loyalty and intimacy, and a friend as someone to disclose one's feelings and thoughts to (Carter &

Nutbrown, 2016:2).

The participants had different views on the number of friends a child would need to live well. The participants, for example, indicated that the number of friends needed in a child's life can range from having two friends to 20 friends. Some participants explained that children who have no friends experience emotions that differ from those who have many friends.

"He will feel very alone, and he will feel like standing alone to one side." (P6)

"Sad. (One can help a child with no friends) to be their friends." (P10)

"Unhappy. Every child needs a friend." (P11)

From the perspectives of the participants, a child without friends would experience negative feelings such as feeling sad, unhappy, and lonely. The literature indicates that friendships have a positive influence on the mental health of children in middle childhood and help children to overcome shyness, anxiety and loneliness (Rogers, 2012:487). Children with few friends and poor peer relationships are more likely to struggle to experience competence, status in life, and mental health as an adult (Holder & Coleman, 2015:81). These long-term effects demonstrate the important role that friendships can play in preventing negative psychosocial effects that can last into adulthood. The long-term effects of friendships indicate how friendships can affect a person's current and future mental well-being (Minkkinen, 2013:551).

3.4.2.4 Theme 4: Having children's basic needs met

Having children's basic needs met is important for their well-being as the probability of mental and physical problems will rise when these needs are not being met (Ten Bruggencate et al., 2019:1826). The participants indicated various resources that children need to live well and mentioned basic needs such as food, water, clothes, and a house as important to children's well-being. These basic needs are discussed in the sub-themes in this section.

- **Sub-theme 4.1: Food is important for children's well-being**

Some participants mentioned that food is important for children to live well, therefore all children must have sufficient food.

"Healthy food, vegetables and fruit. Because then the child is very strong." (P4)

"Bread or macaroni or pizza, porridge ... so that they can grow up and be happy. ... Food is important to eat every day." (P6)

"I will say protein, carbohydrates and I will also say tea and milk. Water as well. ...you need potatoes, vegetables and fruit and things with protein ... It makes your body strong to fight against the germs and when you are grown up it helps to give you a good future." (P8)

“Children need food. Vegetables and fruit. ... it makes you healthy and you feel healthy and strong.” (P11)

For every child to grow up as a healthy adult, basic nutrition is crucial. Eating healthy foods supports an active and healthy lifestyle and is important for optimal growth, development, and health (Department of Health, 2016:1). The research findings indicate that the participants were aware that food should be healthy, such as vegetables and fruit, and consumed each day to make a child’s body strong and healthy, help children to grow and be happy, and ensure a good future for them. The findings and literature suggest that good nutrition is an important indicator for child well-being and ensuring their futures. Healthy food such as vegetables and fruit are rich in minerals, fibre, and vital vitamins (Khodae et al., 2015:1184). A healthy diet improves and maintains overall health by preventing malnutrition as well as diseases such as heart disease, cancer, strokes, and diabetes (Khodae et al., 2015:1184)

Some children do not have access to food. The participants reported how the physical appearance of a child will be when the child has no access to food as well as the consequences it will have on the child’s well-being. They further elaborated on how others can help children to get access to food, as evident in the following views:

“They become very sick, and they are very skinny.” (P2)

“Very sad. He can be very unhealthy. ... We can give them food ... at the school, the house and at the shops.” (P4)

“Because there are children that do not have food and they are very thin and that can also cause death. If you see you have a lot of food, then you can give them food to eat. It will help them.” (P5)

“They will be hungry and unhappy. They look (for food) in the dustbins. ... To give them food and to give them water and to give them a little bit of money.” (P9)

As described by the participants, children’s well-being can be impaired if they have no access to basic nutrition, resulting in extreme hunger and under-nutrition as well as stunting, underweight and wasting in children (Sambu, 2019:235). Usually, signs such as weight loss or weight gain are indications of children not receiving enough food or who are sick (Department of Health, 2016:1). From the participants’ responses it is evident that food is an important indicator for child well-being. It is thus concerning that 11% of the child population in South Africa experience extreme hunger, while malnutrition and food insecurity affect large numbers of children in the country (Sambu, 2019:215). Insufficient food and poor nutrition can have detrimental effects on children’s physical well-being (Minkinen, 2013:550). As well-being is a multidimensional concept in which one domain of well-being will have an influence on the others, insufficient nutrition can affect children’s mental well-being. Mental well-being entails children’s emotional and cognitive functioning (Minkinen, 2013:551; Nahkur & Kutsar,

2019:354). This aspect was suggested by the participants who associated adequate nutrition with children who will be happy.

- **Sub-theme 4.2: Children need clean, drinkable water**

Most participants mentioned that water is a critical resource for children as it is important for a healthy life.

“They need water because they can die if they do not get water. Because if you do not drink water for a few days, then you will die. ... It (the water) is clean and not dirty.” (P2)

“Clean water, clean and white, because it keeps you healthy. He will be happy and healthy, and he will become healthy.” (P3)

“I would think water is see-through, but people can say it is blue because it is also almost see-through. It is important for your body otherwise you will only drink cool drinks with sugar, and it can give you cancer.” (P8)

“And water to drink. Very clean and fresh ... (so) that they are never dehydrated.” (P9)

Some participants elaborated how a child will feel and what the consequences will be when a child has no access to drinkable and clean water or drinks polluted water.

“They would feel sick and not well. They will get viruses ... And they also need soap and water to wash their hands. ... Because if you do not wash your hands and you eat your food, then you swallow the bacteria that was on your hands. ... Their hands are always dirty, and they are always sick.” (P2)

“...the dirt and rubbish, they will become sick.” (P3)

“Sometimes there is moss and sand or mud (in the water). Because you can get healthy with water and you will not dehydrate, they will become sick, and they will not get healthy.” (P6)

“They can become sick and die.” (P8)

As suggested by the participants above, water is vital for children’s health and well-being. Every child has the right to clean water (UNICEF, 2020b:1). The participants mentioned that water should be clean to keep children healthy and happy. Children need access to safe and clean drinking water to be healthy, as poor-quality water can lead to illnesses such as diarrhoea, especially in young children (Edokpayo et al., 2018:2). The participants were aware of the harm of drinking polluted water caused by dirt and rubbish on the health of the child. Participant 1 also indicated that water is important for children’s personal hygiene.

Without safe and clean water, children will not be able to survive. Children, especially young children, are more vulnerable and water related diseases are a cause of death in children and contributes to stunting and malnutrition (UNICEF, 2020b). Furthermore, without soap and taps

for handwashing, these diseases spread quickly. Polluted water, for example water containing trash, human waste, industrial and chemical waste, put children at risk for diseases and death. A lack of clean water is harmful to children's health as they are more likely to develop gastrointestinal infections, dehydration, and diarrhoea, which can lead to a high child mortality rate in South Africa (Hall, 2019e:252).

- **Sub-theme 4.3: Children need appropriate clothes to live well**

From the following quotes, it is evident that the participants valued the need of appropriate clothing for children to live well, feel good and be healthy.

"So that the boys cannot see your body and it helps if someone shot you, it would not go through your body. ... They will look pretty. It will not be nice to them (to not have clothes), and they need to go naked to school then. ... in the winter, you will get sick and die of the cold." (P1)

"It does not have to be fancy clothes as long as you have clothes. It can be long or short clothes. When it is really cold then the child will wear warm and long clothes and when it is hot, then the child will wear short clothes. ... children (with inadequate clothing) can get very sick of the cold and some children do not have clothes and then people mock you. And when you have clothes then you will feel safe, and you will know that nobody can see your body. Children whose clothes are too small can give the clothes to them (children without clothes). They can then use the clothes." (P5)

"You need clothes, otherwise you will get cold all the time and then become sick. ... they will feel sad and will get cold and sick." (P11)

The participants saw clothes as important for children to live well as they protect the body and prevent a child from getting sick. The consequences of children not having clothes to wear would, amongst others, be that children will become sick and feel cold. Children without proper clothing could also be victims of emotional bullying. Humans wear clothes to cover the body, especially to protect the body against rain, cold, climate variation and heat (Sahoo, 2018:2). Clothes were first worn as protection against elements such as enemies, beasts, and insects or against supernatural forces or harm (Ofori et al., 2014:33). In modern times, wearing clothes enables a person to feel more comfortable in society and at home. Clothes protect people from conditions such as severe weather circumstances (Sahoo, 2018:4).

Participants 5 and 6 mentioned the importance of school uniforms for children's well-being.

"So that they can see in what school you are in and that your feet will not feel cold and that you feel comfortable. He (the child) knows he has a school, and he is very happy, and he feels warm if it rains." (P5)

"They should have school uniforms ... Because firstly they cannot go to school in normal (informal) clothes, and (with uniforms) they will look the same and feel good. ... (Children who do not have school uniforms) can do jobs like at the shops; they can clean and help, and they can do something for grandmother and grandfather and then they can get money

and everywhere they can get money. The school has a rule so that everyone can look neat.” (P6)

The participants believed that school uniforms would provide children with a sense of belonging by indicating the school they belong to and whereby all the learners will look the same, look neat and feel good. Their views are supported in literature that describe school uniforms as providing school children with a sense of pride and developing an identity for the school in the community (Spencer, 2013). School uniforms demonstrate that a child is part of an organization and provide learners with a sense of belonging to a specific school (Spencer, 2013). Reidy (2021:13) notes that although school uniforms have certain advantages for children, for example creating a learning environment that is more equitable and lowering competitive dressing, uniforms may also have negative effects. The author argues that, ironically, “the very groups who could benefit most from the equitable access to education that uniform is supposed to facilitate” such as the poor, may not have access to the prescribed uniforms (Reidy, 2021:13). Participant 6 mentioned the aspect of children who cannot afford school uniforms. Given the inequality between the rich and poor in South Africa and that many children live in conditions of poverty (Rees & Main, 2013:30; SAHRC & UNICEF, 2016:5), children’s access to school uniforms must be considered as a factor that could either enhance or lower their well-being.

- **Sub-theme 4.4: Participation in sport can help children live well**

Sport was regarded by the participants as an important resource in children’s lives to support their well-being.

“I think they should do sport. They can do sport and run and be healthy and maybe play netball, soccer, or rugby. It helps you to get fit and it is not always about winning, but to enjoy yourself.” (P2)

“He needs sport. Rugby, tennis, swimming, and dance. It makes me healthy and that I can be fast and enjoy, very happy.” (P4)

“To get fit or you can do like hockey, rugby, netball, soccer, or gymnastics; there are many. To become strong and practice with your friends.” (P6)

“Sport, rugby, hockey, cricket, netball, tennis, athletics. ...any sport so that he can stay fit ... that he can be happy. If they do not want to do sport then it will be okay, but they will never find out how the sport works. (One can do sport) when you are younger and older. Because, if he is older and he has children, then he can tell them when he was young and what sport he did.” (P9)

The participants believed that participating in sport is good for child well-being as it enables children to be healthy and to become fit and strong, but also to enjoy participating in sport and doing sport with friends. As stated by Angba (2022:2-3), an individual who participates in sport and physical activity enjoys advantages such as developing stronger and healthier bones,

being fit, healthier, and having fun, especially when participating in team sports with friends. Playing in sport teams contributes to the child's well-being as well as provides the child with the opportunity to create and maintain friendships (Holder & Coleman, 2015:89). Through sport, individuals gain knowledge of nutrition, health and exercise, and they experience higher levels of physical activity later in their lives. Individuals doing sport have better health than those who do not (Malm et al., 2019:5).

The secondary influence of sport brings other advantages for people, such as personal and psychosocial development for both old and young (Malm et al., 2019:1). Based on a systematic review of research, Eime et al. (2013:19) conclude: "There is substantive evidence of many different psychological and social health benefits of participation in sport by children and adolescents." Emotional benefits include aspects such as better emotional regulation, psychological resilience, fewer depressive symptoms, lower emotional distress, and positive affect, and the social benefits include reduced social anxiety, better cooperation and social skills and general social well-being (Eime et al., 2013:14). It is evident that participation in sport can enhance different domains of well-being. The elements mentioned by the participants and in literature include for example aspects related to physical, emotional and social well-being (Minkinen, 2013:550-551). The advantages are seen as lasting into adulthood, which shows the sustainability of the benefits of sport.

- **Sub-theme 4.5: Having a home to live in**

All the participants mentioned that a child will need a house to live in to experience a sense of well-being. The participants elaborated on the importance of having a home to live in, how it should look like, and the interactions between the people in the home.

"The house is very pretty; it has a swimming pool and a jungle gym, and it has a playground and a television. And it has a bookshelf. ... Good and nice things happen there. They (parents) do not argue or get angry with the children." (P1)

"A house ... It does not have to look nice to show off. If the child thinks the house is nice, then it is fine because Jesus always finds a way to help us and to give us a roof over our heads. ... (The people are) preferably not arguing, because it is not good for the child, and it makes the child sad about it. So, I will say there should be happiness and sunshine. With the people, it must go well and when they feel unhappy, then make them feel happy and make them laugh ... And a brother and sister can argue because it is normal. The family play games together and spend time together." (P5)

"A house to live in ... a bed to sleep in. It has a double storey, and it has a porch outside and a big table in the middle of the house. Couches, there is a kitchen that is in the shape of a square, four bedrooms ... a garden, three bathrooms. (The people in the house) talk together, eat together, braai together ... watch TV together (and must be) nice, friendly, and sometimes someone will tell a joke and then everyone with laugh." (P9)

“A house. It does not matter what the house looks like. It only matters when the windows are broken. Your mother makes food, you father works, and the child plays outside and they spend time together.” (P11)

In their responses, some participants described a more elaborate home, while others believed that the appearance of the home was less important. However, all the participants noted the importance of the circumstances inside the house. They felt that the home environment must be positive and pleasant, for example that the family members should not argue or fight but laugh together and spend time together. The research findings indicate that a child needs a positive, supportive, and safe home environment to live well and feel good, which is also described in the literature. A home is where children spend most of their time, and negative home circumstances can lead to poor health in children (Chatindiara et al., 2022:3). A home must offer children a place where they can feel protected, safe, and comfortable to talk to each other about anything, and provides a child with a sense of belonging, which is an important need of all children (Randolph, 2021). The White Paper on Families in South Africa emphasises that, in addition to meeting children’s basic needs, a family needs to provide its members with a sense of belonging and with nurturing (Department of Social Development, 2013b:6). A home filled with laughter and love helps children and parents to sleep better and assist children to grow up happier and with good memories (Randolph, 2021). On the other hand, children’s well-being is negatively affected if they experience stressful home environments (Casas & Frønes, 2019:7).

Some participants indicated the effects of not having a house on children and shared the following views:

“He will feel sad and feel cold if he does not have a house.” (P2)

“Sad and unhappy. ...if you do not have a house, then you feel hungry and will be dirty and you will not feel well.” (P3)

“It will be very cold as he does not have a blanket or anything, and he would sleep on the ground, and it is very hard. Also, cold because they do not have thick walls that can keep the warmth inside.” (P9)

“Sad, he can become sick; he can become dirty.” (P10)

One participant indicated the consequences that children can experience when living in an overcrowded house.

“It should be one room for a mother and father, a double bed so that they can sleep together. And say you have six children and then three should share a room. ... Sometimes it can be that the baby cries and wakes everyone and the mother has to deal with everyone. Or sometimes it becomes too small for the children, and ... there will not be enough space ... when you become bigger, then you want your own room for personal space.” (P8)

The participants mentioned how homelessness or living in an overcrowded house can have an influence on a child's life. Both the advantages of adequate housing and the disadvantages of inadequate housing for children were described by the participants. Overcrowded households are seen as a risk factor for the well-being of children and families (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2021:3). As also evident in the views of Participant 8, overcrowded households create a stressful home environment (Chatindiara et al., 2021:3). Children living in these households experience a lack of privacy, find it difficult to do schoolwork, and are more exposed to communicable diseases (Hall, 2019d:250). In an overcrowded household children also have limited space, for example to rest, do homework, practice skills, develop their own identity and to interact with family members (Chatindiara et al., 2021:3).

From the research findings and the literature, it can be concluded that having a home is important for children, however, the home of family environment must also be positive to enhance children's well-being. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory emphasises the critical influence of the immediate environment such as the home has on children's development and functioning (Louw et al., 2014:29). The relationships in the microsystem are bidirectional, therefore the family members will have an influence on one another (Berk, 2013:27).

3.4.2.5 Theme 5: Resources in the immediate environment

The participants noted that children should have access to resources other than the necessities mentioned in Theme 4 for them to live well. Some participants mentioned aspects such as having books to read, appropriate sanitation, transport, electronic devices, electricity, and toys to play with. These needs are discussed in the sub-themes in this section.

- **Sub-theme 5.1: Children need books to read**

The participants indicated that children need to have books in their lives and explained how it would enhance children's well-being.

"Books, because it helps with sums and numbers. When you need to do a test with sums and you have read something about it, then you will immediately know the answer. (Without books) they won't get smart, and they will be bored." (P1)

"Reading books because it teaches you words. Books teach you to spell and to say words correctly and it makes you smart ... (Children without books) struggle a little bit. If you have finished ready your book, you can give your book to them, because they also want to start learning." (P5)

"So that they can become smart and read and learn about all the things in the world. ...there are nature books, history books and you can have schoolbooks and reading books that are Afrikaans and English." (P6)

"Because it builds you general knowledge ... and it teaches you big words and if

you go to Grade 3 and there are children that do not know what ‘disrespectful’ means, then this teaches you big words and then your mother can tell you what this means. Then you know big words if your teacher at school asks. (Children without books), we can maybe by times lend our books to them ... If you read, you will become happy and then you will ask your mother for books and you know that your mother will get it for you.” (P8)

The participants believed that books could contribute to children’s well-being by providing them, amongst others, with knowledge, words, numbers, knowledge of how to spell, and help children to become smart. The benefits of reading are highlighted in literature. Reading books can teach children values, concepts, and facts that they can apply to real life (Strouse et al., 2018:1). Children learn new phrases and words when reading and they become aware of different emotions and obtain related knowledge and skills. Reading for pleasure aids a child’s social, cognitive, and educational development, their mental health and well-being (Collier, 2019). Children are exposed to rich language through reading books, including picture books (Strouse, 2018:4). Joint reading has been related to early literacy skills and enhanced vocabulary. Educational book-sharing supports children to construct knowledge to transfer learning to everyday events (Strouse, 2018:2). Access to books can thus enhance children’s mental well-being, which included cognitive and emotional aspects of well-being, and their social well-being, which refers to educational outcomes (Brockeveld et al., 2019:589; Minkinnen, 2013:4-5; Nahkur & Kutsar, 2019:354).

The participants noted the drawbacks of not having access to books for children and suggested that these children should be helped. Hall (2019b:241) highlights this aspect in terms of the well-being of children who grow up in poor households. The author mentions that poverty affects parents’ ability to afford educational materials such as books, which can affect children’s educational and developmental outcomes. The participants raised some thoughts on how children can help other children who do not have books to read. By helping them, these children can feel happy and will have the opportunity to read and learn. These suggestions are an example of support between one microsystem (the child in his or her home) and another microsystem (children from other home environments), which support the value of a strong mesosystem (Berk, 2013:27; Louw et al., 2014:29).

- **Sub-theme 5.2: Having proper sanitation and bathroom facilities**

The findings of the study show the participants’ beliefs that children need proper sanitation and clean bathrooms to live well and feel good. Children’s well-being could be affected by being exposed to dirty bathrooms.

“A bathroom, it should look neat, because (without a bathroom) your body will not be clean.” (P1)

“The bathroom, toilet ... clean and pretty. To clean it each day and to look after it. (If not clean) nobody will go there, and we will become sick.” (P3)

“It should be very clean and there should be a sink and a toilet. They can mop it or clean the toilet with a cloth, and they should have soap. (Without these facilities) they will not feel very good, and they will become sick, and they will not be well.” (P6)

“It should be clean, and it needs a sink and toilet. (Otherwise) he will not feel well, he will be unhappy.” (P9)

The above participants explained how bathroom facilities should look like and the impact that a dirty bathroom will have on children’s well-being. However, many children in South Africa do not have access to proper sanitation. Proper sanitation is important for all children (Martin et al., 2018:117). Hall (2019e:253-254) states that insufficient sanitation does not only affect children’s safety and health and places them at risk for illnesses such as eye infections, skin diseases, cholera, or malaria, but also affect their dignity. Because of dirty bathrooms, children do not drink enough water as they do not want to go to a dirty bathroom. This situation can result in dehydration, which can cause bowel and bladder problems as well as headaches, difficulty in concentration and tiredness. Bladder infections, soiling and constipation are also health problems which are caused by dirty bathrooms and toilets (NT Contributor, 2012). It is evident that dirty bathrooms have a huge impact on children’s health and on different facets of their well-being, including their mental well-being such as their dignity and their ability to concentrate on their work (Minkkinen, 2013:551; Nahkur & Kutsar, 2019:354). The wide effects of poor sanitation show that the facets of well-being are interrelated (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014:6).

- **Sub-theme 5.3: Access to transport**

The participants believed that having access to transport is important to children, as in the examples below.

“They also need transport because sometimes they can get tired if they walk long distances. ... Because it can get very cold, or you need to walk long distances or if it snows then you can also not walk. ...they feel cold when they walk and if they do not have shoes then their feet will hurt. ... (When) you are inside the car or bakkie and then the people maybe sing songs, and you get warm and feel safe in the car.” (P2)

“... because you need to go to school and learn and you would like to explore the world. You want to go shopping and go to the mall. (Children without transport) must walk because they do not have cars or bikes. And it takes them a very long time, because they get home at 12 and then they need to bath and shower and then already need to get up (in the morning). Because his feet will become sore.” (P5)

The advantage of having transport is confirmed by Anwar (2012:73). The participants indicated several advantages of transport such as the ability to go places they desire; the convenience

and comfort of transport by car; safety, and private space. It should be noted that the participants lived in urban settings and in families that did not experience socio-economic challenges. The disadvantage of not having transport was also mentioned by the participants. Mackett and Thoreau (2015:5) mention that the lack of transport negatively impacts the family's welfare, and the authors give the example of families living in low-income households or single mothers with young children who may be compelled to walk through isolated and unsafe areas. Children living in low socio-economic households spend more time walking to places (Mackett & Thoreau, 2015:8-9). Hall and Richter (2018:22) note that aspects such as a lack of services, including transport, make it difficult for many families to effectively raise children, and they emphasise the role of the state to provide sufficient public services. These services indicate the importance of an effective exosystem in children's well-being (Berk, 2013:27).

- **Sub-theme 5.4: Having electronic devices**

The findings of the study indicate that the participants viewed electronic devices, referring to a cell phone, television or laptop, as important resources to be included in a child's life. They elaborated on why electronic devices are needed for children to live well.

"If you do not have someone that stays near you then you can call them (on a cell phone) and a television can help because sometimes there are interesting stories that can help children. I think they (children without a television or cell phone) will feel alone and that the people forget about them because they cannot talk to them." (P2)

"They need a TV. You can watch movies and it makes the child happy. It helps him to learn if there are sums (mathematics) on the television." (P3)

"Sometimes a cell phone and laptop. If you are in trouble ... then you can call for help or the laptop, like one that you can do research on what to do and there are laptops that you can send messages with." (P8)

"Every child that is in school, especially high school needs a cell phone because if a child does not have a phone, he cannot talk to his friends after school. Because maybe they are in a different school and then you do not know how they are doing or where they are living and if you have a phone, you can communicate and hear where he is staying. (Children without cell phone) will feel unhappy and they will not be able to communicate with people." (P11)

The participants saw electronic devices such as a television as necessary as it helps children to learn, especially when children watch educational programmes. Cell phones help children to stay in contact and communicate with people, and phone for help whenever the child is in trouble, and laptops provide children with access to the internet to do research. The findings of the study are also described in literature. Electronic devices have positive influences on children's lives, as it can be used for research and support critical thinking (Charles Nechtem Associates, 2021). The internet provides the child with access to resources and information

which help children to learn about different topics, to communicate and to stay connected with family members or friends who live far from the child as well as to interact with peers (Charles Nechtem Associates, 2021).

Participants 2 and 5 indicated that children should not have access or have limited access to electronic devices as it can negatively influence children.

“Children should not watch a lot of television.” (P2)

“I do not think that they (children) should have cell phones or televisions, because they see ugly comments on television, or they see ugly things on the television, and they use ugly videos... pictures. Just on the cell phone they say bad things. (Cell phones are important for children because) If you are in trouble, immediately you can call your mother or father.” (P5)

Although there are benefits of having access to electronic devices, it also has negative effects on children. Literature shows that children face the danger when browsing on the internet using either a laptop or cell phone to be exposed to inappropriate interaction with strangers and unsuitable content (Charles Nechtem Associates, 2021). The access to communication with dangerous individuals or exposure to sexual content are risks that are associated with internet use (Mustafaogly et al., 2018:240). Morgan et al. (2021:711-712) note that research have found that too frequent use of electronic devices may be harmful to children as it replaces other activities such as parent-child interaction, physical activity, reading and regular sleep patterns that are beneficial for their development. The mentioned authors suggest that parents make family rules for TV and other digitally based activities. It can be concluded that, although children may benefit from electronic devices, excessive use thereof may affect children's physical well-being such as their health, their social well-being such as interpersonal interactions, and their mental well-being, including their emotions and cognitive functioning (Minkkinen, 2013:550-551; Nahkur & Kutsar, 2019:354).

- **Sub-theme 5.5: The importance of having electricity**

Electricity was indicated by the participants as an important resource for children. The participants further mentioned the effects of no access to electricity.

“He needs a light. Because when it is night and it is dark and the child is scared, then he can see and leave his light on. (Without electricity) he will be sad, and he can call his brother or sister.” (P3)

“Electricity, otherwise, you cannot see anything. ... He cannot watch television or go to the bathroom and shower. He cannot make coffee or get food, or he cannot read books.” (P5)

“So that you can see where you walk and so that you do not feel scared when you want to go to sleep ... (With no electricity) they will not see at night, and they will feel scared at night, and they will not feel that good.” (P6)

“A light to see, to switch on the light to do homework. (Otherwise) they will light candles, (feel) scared.” (P10)

The participants mentioned that electricity is important so that children can see, do not feel scared of the dark, and are able to do homework, amongst other tasks. According to Day (2018), electricity is needed to allow people to conveniently clean and cook and switch on the lights inside the house. Electricity is crucial for operating appliances and technological devices. Electricity is used for heating water, cooking, cleaning, entertainment, and lighting (The scientific world, 2020). Without electricity, adults and especially children will not be able to perform the tasks that are essential to live well. In 2018, access to electricity was one of the services suggested by government departments and civil society for breaking the “intergenerational cycle of risk” that many vulnerable South African children are exposed to (Proudlock & Rohrs, 2018:14). This goal can be linked to sustainable futures for children, which includes mitigating poverty and inequality and promoting human dignity and social inclusion (Global Education Monitoring Report, 2016; Savahl et al., 2017:39).

- **Sub-theme 5.6: Having toys to play with**

Some participants believed children need toys as toys provide them with the opportunity to experience happiness and a childhood where children still play.

“Toys, it does not matter how many. It does not have to be a lot. It can be like a teddy bear, a big teddy bear or a fake horse ... so that they can learn and know how it feels to play with toys. (If not having toys) when they are big, then they will never know how toys feel or how to play with toys.” (P5)

“There should be a lot of things to play with. Like cars, Lego's ... you should have a shovel to build. ... (then) he can be very happy.” (P9)

“He needs a ball, a school bag, pencils and pens and toys to play with. Because that is what they need.” (P11)

The participants described a range of toys, from having a teddy bear and cars to building something using building materials that would be good for children. Yazgin (2021:22) describes different kinds of toys and the functions thereof: traditional toys that are symbolic such as toy cars, dolls, and a cooking set; fine motor manipulation toys such as puzzles and blocks; creative toys such as playing with dough or clay; conceptual and language functional toys such as card games; and lastly, physical/motor toys such as a bicycle. Toys provide children with the chance to create and imagine and teach children to adapt to the adult world and realize their own strengths (Yazgin, 2021:215, 217). Playing with different materials encourages cognitive growth and builds creativity and imagination in children. Play positively influences the emotional, physical, and mental health of a child (Blahey, 2021). Play materials can thus enhance different aspects of children's well-being. The selection of toys described

by Yazgin (2021) above, shows that toys do not always have to be store bought, but can also be home-made such as playdough, blocks, or clay.

3.4.2.6 Theme 6: Access to services and places in the child's community

The participants provided information indicating that children need access to services and resources in the community for them to live well. These facilities and services could include a shop, medical services, a school, church, park or playground, and a fire station. These places and services are discussed in the sub-themes in this section.

- **Sub-theme 6.1: Having access to shops**

Some participants indicated that different types of shops are needed to contribute to a child's well-being.

"A toy store with a lot of books because I like reading books a lot. And a shop with clothes. ...it has all the toys in the world, puppets, reading things, painting materials, bubbles, clay materials and swimming stuff. ...so that we have things to play with and that we have swimming things to swim with. (Without these) they feel very sad." (P1)

"(The shop) is full of healthy food and water and looks pretty. (Otherwise, people can grow crops) in a garden." (P4)

"You can get food, or you can get animals or sweets. ... (With no access to shops) he will not be hungry, but he will feel like he must have something." (P6)

"You find different types of shops. You get a (pharmacy) that will have medicine and one or two nice things that will help like toothbrushes." (P8)

The participants indicated that shops are important for children, for example shops for clothing, a pharmacy, toy and pet shops, and food stores that sell healthy food such as vegetables and fruit and also sweets. In the literature it is confirmed that stores such as grocery stores, health shops and stores for food provide individuals with the day-to-day products that help society to function and support the needs of people to enhance their well-being (Farmer, 2019). The stores are in a shopping centre or mall, or it can be free-standing structures. A store provides in clients' specific needs (Indeed Editorial Team, 2021). Products that can be bought in a store provide the customers with a choice of products to buy. Different items can be sold in a shop, ranging from expensive and complex goods to basic, inexpensive, and small items (Indeed Editorial Team, 2021). In South Africa, many goods are sold not only in formal shops or centres but by informal traders, which may give communities greater access to food (Horwood et al., 2019:2).

- **Sub-theme 6.2: Medical and healthcare services and facilities**

The participants suggested that healthcare services such as a hospital and doctors, dentists and nurses are important for children as these services aim to improve children's health and overall well-being.

"I think you need to go to the dentist and the doctor regularly so that you can see if you are still healthy and if anything is wrong with you. (The dentist) is always friendly and he always wants to help, and he does not hurt you a lot. You sit in a chair and then he shines a light in your mouth, and he checks if your teeth are still fine and if something is wrong, then he will make an appointment so that he can fix it. (The doctor), it is clean in the room ... there are no germs, and the doctor is also very friendly. He regularly washes his floors, and he sanitizes his room and every day he puts on clean bedding after each child he sees. (The child) feels a bit scared ... a doctor can help you if you have something wrong with your body or something needs to change or if you are sick then he can give you pills or medicine." (P2)

"The hospital, full of people, beds. The people (doctor, nurses) help other people so that they can become healthy and receive help. (Without these) he will feel sad and will become sick." (P4)

"(The hospital) is very big and bigger than everything. There are nurses, doctors, a place where you can eat, a lot of rooms, bathrooms, and televisions. ... It helps you; if you are very sick, they help you and if you are in an accident, they also help you. They make you stronger and healthier. ... The ones (staff) really want to help you and not make you sicker." (P5)

The participants described different aspects related to healthcare facilities, for example the need for medical services, how children will be treated, how the facilities will look like, and that medical services would help children to heal and to be healthy. Ghost et al. (2020:63) confirm that the hospital environment needs to be comfortable, clean, well furnished, and logically organized to provide medical care and decrease the detrimental effects of illness on families and children.

The tasks of doctors are to interact with people and diagnose and treat injuries and illnesses, and a dentist attends to people's oral health (Indeed Editorial Team, 2022). In the hospital children observe doctors and nurses as individuals who wear white gowns who take care of them; however, children can also be afraid of going to the doctor as they have the image of them injecting them or forcing them to open their mouths (Ghost et al., 2020:62-63). Proudlock and Rohrs (2018:14-15) emphasise that the South African government must ensure that all families and children have access to adequate health care services and that poor quality health services must be identified and rectified. Children's health has much wider effects than their physical well-being and also affects other dimensions of their well-being (Minkkinen, 2013:550).

- **Sub-theme 6.3: Having access to a school**

Several participants spontaneously mentioned the importance of having access to a school for children's well-being as attending school can guarantee a positive future for the child.

"You must go to school so that you feel well ... The school is a very happy school, yes, and it is not an angry school ... (A school is important) so that children can get smart, and that they know how to make friends and to feel how it feels to have friends. Also, to learn how to share." (P1)

"A school. You must have a teacher to teach you to get smart and learn your work. It is usually a big building with different departments with different classes ([and] a lot of children in different grades, teachers. You get sanitized and your temperature gets taken (COVID-19 measures). (Without schools, children will feel) sad, they are not able to learn." (P2)

"A school. Some of your friends go and other children can also go there, and you can become friends. ...big school but not that big, but it can go from Grade 1 up to Grade 12 and it should have friendly teachers. Sometimes there are bullies at the school but there can be a teacher and your best friends who can help you." (P6)

"All the children (must go to school). You get smart and you learn much more. (If not) the child will not get a job at the end of the day. Although children do not want to go to school, it will help you to find a job someday." (P5)

"(If children do not attend school) they feel sad, and they will not become smart and not know what 10 plus 10 is." (P1)

The participants believed that attending school helps a child to become smart and provides the child with the opportunity to learn as well as with the opportunity to make friends. The findings of the study indicate that a child who is not attending school could be at risk of not learning new skills or gain knowledge, which put them at risk of being unemployed when they reach adulthood. School is an important microsystem for children as it is the place where they spend most of their time outside the home (Berk, 2013:17; Buck et al., 2018:1255-1256).

Kapur (2019) states that attending school and getting an education have a positive influence on the well-being of children as they are provided with opportunities to learn and transfer knowledge and skills to implement tasks. Thereby they become aware of practices and methods that enable them to enhance their own well-being and participate in and contribute to the improvement of the community's well-being. Children who do not attend school experience the risk of poor knowledge and skills, unemployment, and poor living circumstances (Kapur, 2019). By attending school, children are motivated to achieve good grades and succeed in life, which can prepare them for a career in adulthood (Arora, 2018). Achieving a school education can therefore lead to sustainable outcomes for children. In this respect, Hall (2018:149) states: "Education is a central socio-economic right that provides the foundation for lifelong learning and economic opportunities." The author warns that South

Africa has not made any progress in implementing its Sustainable Development Goals target of reducing the number of youths who do not get an education and are not in employment (Hall, 2018:155).

- **Sub-theme 6.4: Access to a church**

The research findings indicate that the role of a church is important for children as it has a substantial influence on a child's overall well-being.

"They need to go to church. ... It is filled with people and a nice pastor, and he teaches you something about the Bible. ... the pastor reads from the Bible, and he explains to you if you do not understand what he has read. And he also tells stories about things ... (Children) will learn about Jesus and Jesus can also help you when you are sad, happy or when you are angry. (Without church, children) will feel sad in their hearts, and they do not always do the right things." (P2)

"(The church) is very big and full of our friends and very pretty. We sing for Jesus, and we praise Jesus. He can help us to stay healthy and to look pretty. We can pray for him so that Jesus can make our home well." (P4)

"And church. ... You learn about Jesus, and you find out more about Jesus, and you are with him inside the church. So that you can learn to walk with Jesus on the right path. (Children without a church) will be very badly influenced because they are walking on the wrong path. They do bad things." (P5)

"He should go to church. (The church) should not be too big or too small, he should be just right, and the pastor should preach very well and ask for money but also not too much. (Children) will pray, sing and they read out of the Bible. Jesus will help you to move forward and to get friends and to be happy." (P6)

The benefits of access to a church that were mentioned by the participants are described by Jenkins (2022) as activities usually associated with church, such as praying, singing, laughing, sharing food, celebrating, listening and confiding. A church service uplifts and teaches people. What people learn by attending church, gives them guidance on how to follow God; it improves their lives to live a better life and improve their spirituality (ComeuntoChrist, 2022). At church, people can make friends, build support networks, and experience a sense of belonging (ComeuntoChrist, 2022). As studies on religion were mostly done with adult participants, Chen and VanderWeele (2018) conducted research on the association of a religious upbringing on adolescents' health and well-being. The authors came to the following conclusion: "Consistent with prior literature, our results suggest associations of frequent religious participation in adolescence with greater subsequent psychological well-being, character strengths, and lower risks of mental illness and several health behaviors" (Chen & VanderWeele, 2018:2361). It is evident that church and religion are important factors to support children's mental and physical well-being as two elements of child well-being indicated by Minkinnen (2013:550-551).

- **Sub-theme 6.5: Outside parks, playgrounds or play areas**

Most of the participants indicated that a park, playground or play area has positive effects on children in terms of children experiencing happiness when playing outside.

“The park, pretty and clean and nice, it is clean with no papers. They play ... he becomes good, big, and strong. (Without a clean park), they are unhappy and sad, and they are not strong and feel sick.” (P4)

“A park. It is big ... and there are nice things ... jungle gyms. They have fun.” (P5)

“To play outside. You can play at a kindergarten or visit a school to go play or work. There should be a swing and I do not know what you call it ... (participant shows with her hand ‘n circle) (merry-go-round) and a slide. (Parks are important to children) so that their stress can come out and so that they can be happy.” (P6)

“A place to play. It should have a slide, swings, merry-go-round, sandpit ... jungle gyms, trees ... so that he can play and be happy. (Children who do not have a park) can maybe build their own things, like using sticks or planks. They will be unhappy.” (P9)

The participants mentioned that a playground or park needs to be clean, spacious, and have equipment such as jungle gyms, swings, slides, a sandpit, and trees. They saw the advantages of access to parks as helping children to feel happy, become strong, to reduce stress and provide them with the opportunity to have fun. Being outdoors provides children with the opportunity to learn and explore in a safe and secure yet challenging space where they can do things in various ways, which enhance their sense of well-being and all the aspects of their development (Undiyaundeye, 2017:14). People, especially children, play because it is fun (Goldstein, 2012:3). Play improves the quality of life of a child, reduces stress and creates joy in children and makes them feel good. With sufficient play spaces and play materials, the child receives the best opportunity to become happy, healthy and an effective member of society (Goldstein, 2012:5-6). The physical benefits of playing on a playground include an increase in coordination, flexibility, balance, and gross and fine motor skills, an increase in positive emotions and a decrease in stress (Goldstein, 2012:6). Physical play in outdoor parks or spaces, which is seen as the microsystem of the neighbourhood (Berk, 2013:27) therefore have benefits for children’s physical and mental well-being (Minkinen, 2013:550).

- **Sub-theme 6.6: There must be fire stations to protect children against fires**

Some of the participants were of opinion that the safety services that a fire station provides are important for children’s well-being. Fire stations help protect families and their houses, which are important resources for a child.

“If your house is on fire, then they come immediately and they come and save your house. It is a red truck; I have never seen it. They make a weird noise and have a big hosepipe with water. ... You will not lose your house then.” (P5)

“I think I will say this one (fire station) because if your house is on fire, then you can call them and then they can help. (Without a fire station) he will not have a house and he will need to work very hard to get money.” (P6)

“If there is a fire, then the fire truck comes. They extinguish the fire.” (P10)

As indicated by the participants, a fire station and firefighters protect people and save lives by quickly responding to and extinguishing fires (Faro, 2022). They also provide help to people who are trapped or injured in buildings, other locations, or cars. Institutions and government provide firefighting services to protect properties and the lives of people when fires break out. Quick reactions to incidences of fire are crucial to putting out fires before the harm expands as well as for rescuing people (Ayoosu & Lim, 2019:552). In South Africa, young children are especially at risk of injuries in the home, including burns and fires, and therefore need close adult supervision when they explore their environment (Van Niekerk & Mathews, 2019:117). It is evident that when fires do occur, quick reaction by fire services serves as a protective factor for children’s well-being.

3.4.2.7 Theme 7: The quality of the environment in which children live

Taking the responses of the participants into account, a child needs a positive, clean, safe, and secure environment to live well, grow and develop. In the study of Adams et al. (2019:545), children indicated that the environment and the community they live in should be friendly and healthy and the people in the community should keep the environment clean and safe as it will help children to live well. The following sub-themes focus on the views of the participants on aspects in the environment that could enhance children’s well-being.

- **Sub-theme 7.1: Children need a clean environment with no pollution**

Some of the participants indicated that a clean environment is needed for a child to live well. They described how a clean environment should look like and the benefits of living in a clean environment for the child.

“It should look nice and clean. ... There should not be dirty stuff on the ground. That is what we did, there was always stuff lying on the grass and then we picked it up. And to plant nice plants and flowers. Because the little animals like the bucks and foxes can eat it (dirt) and get sick and even die. ... It will become very bad, and children will become sick. ... The earth will become dirty, and we can become sick.” (P1)

“It should be clean and there should not be stuff lying on the road. People should pick up papers on the ground and they must not throw their stuff on the ground (but) in the dustbin. It will be nice, and people would love to live in that environment. (People who do not have a clean environment) will not know what the right thing is to do, and they will also start to throw their rubbish around. ... They will get germs and become sick, and they can maybe die then.” (P2)

“This place where we are staying is much safer and cleaner than the other places. It is clean and pretty. (It makes children) happy ... and healthy, because otherwise you can get sick. ... Rubbish, if you burn it then the ashes get to you. They will become sick.” (P3)

“No pollution, it infects their lungs and Jesus made a planet for us and he did not say it cost that much, he made it with love for us. ... (In an unpolluted environment) they will feel that they can run around without being afraid to step on something.” (P5)

“I heard about people talking about it that it (no pollution) helps a lot. ... because then you will not have a dirty world and it will teach people ... to develop stories to show people how to live well and dirty can also help. I think (pollution) will make people sick with the germs and everything and the ozone layer has a hole in it, the rubbish that lies around makes it bigger.” (P8)

The participants described a positive environment as one in which there should not be rubbish or litter lying around, and people should pick up the rubbish to keep the environment clean. A dirty environment will cause children to become sick or even lead to death and not only influence the health of people but animals as well. Environmental quality is one of the elements in the holistic concept of child well-being (Buck et al., 2018:1263; Nahkur & Kutsar, 2019:355). Diseases such as diarrhoea are threatening illnesses which are caused by a dirty environment; therefore, the environment should be clean to be a comfortable and safe environment to live in (Byrd, 2020). A clean, inviting, and healthy environment can change people's mood to being mostly happy and cheerful (Byrd, 2020). People need to keep the environment clean by not littering (Byrd, 2020). Pollution causes developmental disabilities and injuries that harm children's health, decreases their ability to learn, and reduces later lifetime earnings (Landrigan, 2018:102). On the other hand, a clean environment leads to a longer lifespan, enhances healthy living, secures the survival of organisms, and reduces global warming (Byrd, 2020). To protect the health and well-being of present and future generations, pollution control needs to be prioritised, which will result in children staying healthy (Landrigan, 2018:104).

Minkkinen (2013:551) notes that environmental conditions relate to children's material well-being. Environmental well-being is one of the three dimensions of human well-being (Coompton & Hoffman, 2013:51; Fattore & Mason, 2017:276; Miller et al., 2012:23; Savahl et al., 2017:31). The state of the natural environment can have either a positive or negative effect on sustainable development. With reference to protecting the environment for present and future generations, Proudlock et al. (2019:23) state that “South Africa is extremely vulnerable and exposed to the impacts of climate change due to our socio-economic and environmental context and it is recognised that children, especially infants, are particularly susceptible to the adverse effects of climate change.”

- **Sub-theme 7.2: No water pollution**

Some participants indicated that it is important for children that there are clean rivers and oceans and explained the importance thereof as well the consequences of polluted rivers and oceans.

“The rivers should always be clean and there should not be rubbish in the water. Because if there is rubbish in the water, then it can kill the animals.” (P1)

“We need to clean the ocean if there is stuff in it. ...the fish will die (because of) bottles and plastic and stuff. (With a clean ocean) we will feel happy.” (P3)

“Mostly plastic, paper, metal, and boxes. We will not feel very good about it, and it will make the animals sick and there will be no more animals. The animals will eat it because they will think that it is food, and they will drown in it, and they will fly against it. ...not just throw it (rubbish) on the ground and if it is there, we can pick it up and throw it in the dustbin. (With a clean ocean) there will be no more dead animals and we will not become sick.” (P6)

“When they are at the sea and the plastic is lying in the sand or in the water, then the sea turtles will swallow it and die. (If oceans area not clean), children will become very sick.” (P11)

The participants described the consequences of materials such as paper, plastic, bottles, boxes, and metal that pollute rivers and oceans, which include children becoming sick and causing animals to die. Water pollution takes place when undesirable materials such as plastic and paper and waste from industries and domestic waste enter rivers, oceans, lakes, or dams. This causes changes in the standard of the water, which are harmful to human health and to the environment (Haseena et al., 2017:16). Water pollution negatively influences the entire ecosystem, including humans and marine life, and causes diseases, illnesses and death of animals (Kılıç, 2021:130-131). Health issues caused by polluted water include infectious diseases, cholera, diarrhoea, vomiting, kidney and skin problems and cancer in humans, while polluted water kills fish, birds, seaweed, and the sea organisms that provide people with food (Haseena et al., 2017:16-17).

In line with the suggestion by Participant 6, any waste that can contribute to polluting the ocean or rivers can be picked up and thrown away or placed in a plastic bag (Haseena et al., 2017:17). To prevent water pollution, it is important to educate people about the environment and about the negative impact of water pollution (Kılıç, 2021:130). It is evident that children as well as animals need clean rivers, dams, and oceans to stay healthy and live well. Proudlock et al. (2019:23) note that children are especially vulnerable to the effects of water pollution as their central nervous system, digestive system and immune system are still developing. It is concluded that exposure to polluted water can have long-term effects on children's physical well-being, which included aspects such as ill health and poor physical functioning (Minkinen, 2013:550).

- **Sub-theme 7.3: No air pollution**

The participants furthermore regarded clean air as important for children's health and well-being. They shared their views on the importance of living in an environment without air pollution, as in the following examples:

"The clouds become black and dirty. Not to smoking or vaping, because it is very dirty and make our air dirty and when we inhale the air, then it can infect our lungs." (P5)

"... and this one, clean air. It should be see-through, and it should be clean and should not be brown or full of ash ... so that your brain can get good air and that you can feel good. ... smoke from factories, we can make less things in the factories ... it can make us sick, and it will give us a headache." (P6)

"Clean air I also think so that you do not breathe in bad things. It will be that there are no germs that is in the air ... He can become sick or sometimes mold floats around (in the air) and it can influence your body." (P8)

"There should not be a lot of smoke. If people sometimes braai and then there comes smoke or the places (factories) that make paper, it becomes dirty and the air looks dirty if you look at the mountains and then sometimes you cannot see them and when the air is clean, then you can see it. And when you breathe, you will breathe in the smoke (and get) lung cancer." (P9)

The participants explained that children need clean air to live well, as dirty air influences children's health. They ascribed dirty air to aspects such as people smoking and making fires, and to factories that pollute the air. Air pollution is the existence of substances in the atmosphere that are dangerous to the health of living beings and humans, or cause harm to the environment and to the climate (Shaltami et al., 2020:17). Air pollution includes smoke, dust, and biological elements such as bacteria (Mabahwi et al., 2014:223). Air pollution is also caused by human activities such as the release of smoke and other forms of waste into the air, which causes a decline in air quality and unhealthy living conditions (Mabahwi et al., 2014:224). People who breathe in dirty air could be at risk of developing lung cancer (Mabahwi et al., 2014:225). Furthermore, high levels of carbon monoxide released by heavy traffic as well as dust, wood smoke, diesel exhaust molecules and ash particles pollute the air and can affect people's respiratory system (Mabahwi et al., 2014:227). Air pollution cause allergies, diseases, and death in humans while it is also harmful to living organisms such as food crops and animals (Shaltami et al., 2020:17).

The importance of a clean, non-polluted environment for children's well-being is evident in the increased focus on studies on the role of the natural environment in child well-being (Adams et al., 2019:547; Buck et al., 2018:1263; David & Weinstein, 2013:4). Children from impoverished communities are especially vulnerable to negative environmental influences

such as natural disasters or household pollution such as toxic fumes released from the widespread use of fire and coals for cooking (Alston, 2015:357; Rother et al., 2019:165).

3.4.2.8 Theme 8: How children can be involved in their own well-being

There are many ways children can be involved and improve their own well-being. The participants had specific views on how children can improve their own well-being. These aspects are discussed in the sub-themes in this section.

- **Sub-theme 8.1: Supporting the well-being of others**

Some of the participants indicated that children could help other children and animals, which will enhance the well-being of others but also their own well-being.

“We can give some of our toys to children and play with them and talk to them nicely. (If children do not get help) they will always be unhappy, and they do not have any toys and then they should always sleep on the floor.” (P1)

“You can read him something in the Bible and you can help them to follow the right path. You should always be friendly to people that you know. You feel happy and he does not feel sad. ... You can help animals that struggle ... Sometimes I see dogs that are very skinny walking with people. So, you can give them some food. ... You can also help animals that look sick, to take them to the vet. They can also receive special care so that they can feel better and to get medicine.” (P2)

Helping others, as described by the participants, refers to the interpersonal trait of kindness, in which people help one another without expecting any reward for it (Youngs et al., 2021:1). As explained by the participants, helping others can ensure that other children also experience better well-being. Marinis (2022) notes the importance of how children treat others around them, such as always being kind to others. Participant 2 mentioned that the child who helps others will also experience increased happiness. Several studies found that being kind has certain benefits for the person who shows kindness to others. These benefits include lower anxiety levels, healthy social interactions, better physical health, and higher subjective well-being and life satisfaction (Youngs et al., 2021:1).

Donating toys ensures that children whose parents cannot afford to buy them toys, have toys to play with. Such acts enhance children’s happiness but also help to reduce environmental pollution that will benefit children as they will live in a clean and pollution-free environment (Turner, 2022). Helping animals in need, for example by donating food or taking them to the vet, is a rewarding experience (Castaneda, 2019). Supporting the well-being of others can lead to an improvement in children’s physical and mental well-being as well as their environmental well-being (Minkinnen, 2013:550-551; Newland et al., 2019:395). Supporting the well-being of other children or animals can therefore enhance the well-being of other children as well as children’s own subjective well-being.

- **Sub-theme 8.2: Children can take actions to enhance their own well-being**

Some participants mentioned that children can take responsibility for enhancing their own well-being.

“I can play by myself and with my brother and I can rest.” (P4)

“In the house, they (children) can eat (all their food) at night and sleep so that they do not get tired, and outside there is a space to play. (Otherwise) he will feel unhappy and will feel hungry. He will not have a smile on his face.” (P9)

“You can play outside; you can ride your bike and do your homework. You can do everything. They should play and do their homework and eat healthy.” (P11)

The participants suggested different strategies for children to feel well, for example play and rest, eat enough healthy food and get enough sleep, do activities such as riding a bike, and do their homework. Moving, playing (playing outside and playing with toys) and doing physical activities help children to feel good, support the healthy development of children’s whole body, boost their energy, and make them healthier and happy (Sesame Workshop, 2017:9). Children need to eat healthy food and get enough rest and sleep and stay active and drink enough water to have enough energy to play and move around each day (Sesame Workshop, 2017:33, 37). Doing homework supports the development of attitudes and skills such as self-regulation, setting goals, self-efficacy, concentration, time management and organization, which are important for life-long success and academic progress (McNulty, 2018:6-7). Positive work ethics develop when children complete homework tasks and will guide a child in the future (McNulty, 2018:7). The participants’ thoughts and plans on how children can improve their own well-being indicate that children’s perspectives can be considered in interventions to enhance child well-being.

- **Sub-theme 8.3: Children can help to keep their environment clean**

The participants believed that children could enhance their own well-being by keeping their environment tidy and clean. The environment would include their home environment as well as their wider community. Some participants indicated that children could help with chores around the house to help their parents and to improve their own well-being, as expressed in the following views:

“I usually ask my mother, if I can help her with the dishes or help her with making the food and with my father, I usually ask him if I can help him to clean the swimming pool and pick up all the leaves.” (P1)

“Help my mother and father in the house and sometimes outside. Sometimes I wash the dishes for my mother, pick up the rubbish and throw it in the dustbin. Otherwise, you will get sick. Dogs can die if we do not pick up the rubbish. ... if they (children) help, then their parents do not have to do everything.” (P3)

"I can help them (parents) to clean the kitchen and to help them with the dishes and the garden. (When children do not help), then mother and father can become very angry if they do not rest." (P4)

"If you see that your mother is sick and tired and it is cleaning day, then you can help around the house like cleaning the house. At the end of the day, it is your mother and father that do everything. (If children do not help their parents) the mother and father will see, and they will not feel good about their children. ...they see that their children do nothing and that makes them sad. (Children can help to) make up your bed and help with the dishes in the house. Because at the end of the day, they will also grow up and have their own house and then they should be able to do this stuff on their own." (P5)

According to the participants, helping parents with chores will support parents, keep the home environment clean and tidy, and teach children new skills and a sense of responsibility which they can use in the future. Li (2016:2497) confirms that children can help in the home with chores such as trimming and mowing the lawn, hand-washing dirty clothes, and preparing a meal, for example chopping and peeling ingredients, and washing dishes. A child who engages in doing chores can experience positive benefits such as enhanced responsibility and interpersonal skills, educational and future career success, and mental health benefits such as empathy (Li, 2016:2497).

Some participants mentioned that keeping the neighbourhood clean can help children to live well and feel good and improve their own well-being. The participants mentioned different ways children can keep the environment clean.

"We can pick it (rubbish) up and throw it somewhere else. The people that stay with us, my friends, my grandparents, and my aunt, if people help you to pick up stuff, to pick up the rubbish." (P3)

"To not throw papers on the ground and to throw everything in the dustbin or to recycle it. ...that no one throws it out the window or on the ground, like paper, carton, glass ... you can recycle it or (throw) in a dustbin." (P9)

"Pick up the stuff (rubbish). ... They can help us to pick up the rubbish ... throw it in the dustbin." (P10)

Keeping the environment clean by not littering but throwing rubbish like paper, glass and carton in the dustbin or recycling it, can contribute to a clean environment which is important to improve children's well-being. To keep the environment clean, children can do activities such as using less plastic and to throw trash in one place and not on the ground. Infrastructures and facilities can support these efforts, for example providing trash bins which are easily accessible for children to throw away trash (Yufiarti, 2019:345). Individuals such as teachers, parents, family members and caregivers can provide guidance and support to children to keep the environment clean (Yufiarti, 2019:342). UNICEF (2018:42) notes that aspects such as dirty streets and polluted soil increase child vulnerability and suggests, in line with Sustainable Development Goals 11 and 12, that child-responsive urban settings must

include clean streets and waste management by municipalities to reduce health risks for children. Clean environments, as suggested by the participants, will thus entail interventions in different ecological systems, for example the child's home environment (the microsystem) as well as the community and community services (the exosystem) (Berk, 2013:27).

3.4.2.9 Theme 9: Parents can include children in enhancing child well-being

According to the participants, parents can involve children in different ways to enhance children's well-being. Parents can involve children by teaching and guiding them to be more independent; to listen, support and care for them; and to acknowledge children's participation in helping parents.

- **Sub-theme 9.1: Teach and guide children to be more independent**

Some of the participants suggested that parents can help children to become more independent by including children in the different tasks at home.

"They can help their father outside when working on the cars, then you know how to fix it on your own when you are big. ... To wash dishes, make coffee and to pack your own school bag and food for school, because parents cannot do everything on their own. They will feel happy ... The parents will be very proud of the child for helping." (P5)

"They (children) can prepare food with them (parents). They can braai with his father, work in the garden together ... His father or mother can play cricket or play hockey or tennis with him. ... Because then when they are older, they know how to do it." (P9)

Parents can teach children skills which they can use when they are older, such as washing dishes, cleaning, how to fix a car, and playing different sport types. The participants also mentioned that parents will feel happy knowing that their children learn skills which they can use in the future. Children learn by doing things by themselves (World Health Organization, 2012:8). Age-appropriate tasks teach children skills and self-reliance and from the age of 6- or 7-years children can do chores around the house such as clearing the dinner table, sorting laundry, weeding, and gathering leaves (Berry, 2022). As children grow up, they use what they have learned, which can enhance children's future functioning. Therefore, parents who help, play with, and communicate with children and vice versa, help children to grow stronger and healthier, and as children grow up, they become more competent (World Health Organization, 2012:5-6). Parents who help children to become more competent help to prepare their children for growing up as competent adults, which can contribute to sustainable futures for them.

- **Sub-theme 9.2: Help children to experience a sense of accomplishment**

Some of the participants believed that children could become more involved in enhancing their own well-being when they get opportunities to experience a sense of accomplishment. Parents can thus help children by acknowledging their efforts to help parents around the house.

“Help my mother ... because (if children do not help) then they (parents) should do everything, and the children just sit and do nothing. ... every time they help their parents when they say come and help, then maybe after they helped, they will have a sweetie.” (P3)

“They (children and parents) can work well together and be happy together and play. They can wash the dishes or throw out the dustbin or sweep things or clean their rooms. Their parents will be happy, and they will maybe give them (children) money.” (P6)

The above participants believed that parents could acknowledge children’s efforts to help them by rewarding them. Rewards refer to material objects such as snacks, stickers, or toys, and parents use the reward and praise system to help and teach children, to strengthen and maintain existing behaviours, or teach them new skills and behaviours (Bear et al., 2018: S6H4–1). This strategy helps the child to recognize the good behaviour and help the child to feel successful and build the child’s competence (Bear et al., 2018: S6H4–3). Children who experience themselves as being successful in doing tasks develop a mastery orientation in which they value their own ability and hard work (Louw & Louw, 2014a:239). Developing a positive view of oneself and one’s abilities can lead to a positive perspective of the self, which is an aspect of subjective child well-being (Minkinnen, 2013:550).

3.5 SUMMARY

The research focused on children’s perspectives on child well-being, in which data were collected from a sample of children in middle childhood. In this chapter the researcher discussed the research methodology, the ethical considerations as well as the research findings of the study. The well-being of children is determined by various aspects which are considered important by children. The research findings indicate that the participants highlighted many components in different ecological levels in the child’s environment that can affect the well-being of a child. It is therefore important to consider children’s views and provide them with opportunities to be involved in interventions that can improve their well-being. In the next chapter, the key findings of the study as well as the conclusions and recommendations will be presented.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Child well-being is a holistic concept that includes aspects of children's physical, material, social, mental, and environmental well-being that all have an impact on children's perceptions of their quality of life (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014:3; Minkkinen, 2013:550; Nahkur & Kutsar, 2019:355; Statham & Chase, 2010:2). Research on the perspectives of children in South Africa regarding child well-being is limited while many children's lives are affected by numerous challenges and adversities such as poverty, crime and violence (Ayala- Nunes et al., 2018:885; Nadan & Kaye-Tzadok, 2019:464). This study focused on how a sample of South African children perceive child well-being. Information on children's perceptions of child well-being might be used by social workers and other professionals to plan interventions that will support sustainable futures for children. The key findings of the research are summarised in this chapter, followed by the conclusions and recommendations based on the findings and a discussion of the achievement of the goal of the study.

4.2 GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

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

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To conceptualize 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.

4.3 KEY FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The key findings of the study will be discussed in this section.

4.3.1 Indicators of child well-being

The participants believed that people would be able to identify a child who is well by the emotions they experience, their appearance, and whether they are successful.

- Being happy was identified as the most important indication that a child is doing well. One would be able to see happiness in non-verbal indications such as facial expressions demonstrating a smile or positive interactions with friends.
- When a child is not happy, the child will feel angry and show a facial expression of a sad face. Being punished or getting a hiding, family members arguing, being rude or angry with each other, and the child who is bullied, are all factors that make a child unhappy. This leads to the child feeling sad and the child to become negative.
- To receive good care and love from important people in a child's life will make children happy, which indicates that a child is doing well and feels good. Both good care and love is demonstrated by being friendly and kind to children, feeding them, talking to children, and helping them with schoolwork or when they get hurt.
- Some participants mentioned that a child who experiences a sense of well-being will be healthy. Children who eat healthy foods, drink water, and play outside are considered healthy individuals. Healthy children will have healthy bodies, participate in sport, and look strong, while children who are not healthy will feel sick and look sad and angry.
- Being successful is also considered as helping children to live well and feel good. To accomplish tasks, help others and to try new things allow and help children to feel successful and feel happy and good, which will contribute to the child's well-being.

4.3.2 Significant people who can enhance children's well-being

The family, extended family, teachers, and friends with whom the child has close contact with, form part of the child's most immediate environment, therefore the microsystem as described in the ecological systems theory.

- The participants emphasised the importance of being part of a family, which was mostly referred to as including a mother, father, and siblings. Family members are responsible for supporting one another and doing enjoyable activities together.
- What stood out in the participants' answers was that parents play the most important role in taking care and providing love to the child. Most participants felt that both parents, a mother and father, should be present in a child's life. Parents must take care of their children and must have positive characteristics such as being happy, friendly, and helpful, and must also spend time with their children.

- If a child lives with only one parent in a household, most of the participants felt that a mother should be the parent living with the child as she is more capable of caring for and providing in the needs of the child.
- The participants regarded spending time with grandparents as something that can contribute to children's well-being. Grandparents were mostly seen as spending enjoyable times with their grandchildren, rather than taking care of them. They were seen as talking to children, spoiling them, and teaching children about the past.
- Most of the participants felt that children must have siblings for a child to live well. Siblings protect, support, help, and take care of each other. They also argue at times, which was seen as normal behaviour between siblings.
- The participants also saw members of the extended family, such as uncles, aunts, nephews, and nieces, as people who can enhance children's well-being. Children can enjoy special times with these family members, receive help from them when needed and talk to them when they cannot talk to or get information from their parents or siblings.
- Some participants also mentioned that pets are very important for children's well-being. Pets provide emotional support, comfort the child when a child feels sad, play with them, and make the child feel loved. Dogs also protect children during the night and day.

In terms of people in microsystems outside the child's family circle, the participants identified other people that have a positive influence on a child's well-being, namely teachers and friends.

- The participants mentioned that a teacher and friends need to be friendly and supportive individuals as both are important to enhance children's well-being.
- Teachers are important for the well-being of children as they play an essential role in teaching children the skills and knowledge which will benefit the child in the future. Teachers can provide support to children. However, teachers must be friendly and not shout at children when they struggle with their schoolwork.
- Friends were seen as important role-players that contribute to children's well-being as friends play and talk together and enjoy doing activities together. Some participants explained that friends are the ones that comfort and support a child and help a child to feel less lonely. The relationship between friends is considered helpful if friends are supportive, and friendships help to enhance communication and interaction skills between individuals.

4.3.3 Children's basic needs must be met

The participants highlighted several factors that are important for children to live well, which relate to the importance that children's basic needs must be met.

- Healthy food, such as vegetables and fruit were seen as important for a child to live well. Healthy food has the benefits of helping a child to be happy and healthy and ensure a positive future for the child. Children who do not have access to food will be hungry, unhappy, and become sick; and some participants suggested that people should reach out to these children by giving them food.
- Clean and drinkable water was mentioned as important by some participants as clean water keeps a child healthy. Some participants explained that children who do not have access to clean, drinkable water will experience dehydration and be exposed to viruses that will cause children to become sick and could lead to death.
- Clothes were identified as an important basic need for children, as clothes protect the child's body against environmental influences and make a child feel safe. Some participants mentioned the importance of school uniforms to provide a child with a sense of belonging.
- Sport was seen as important for children to participate in, as sport helps a child to become fit and strong and enhances good health. Participation in sport is also enjoyable, increases children's happiness and enables a child to interact with other children.
- Having a home to live in was one of the most important needs for children to live well and was emphasised by all the participants. The size and the physical appearance of the house was not really a concern for all the participants, but rather that a home environment that needed to be safe, loveable, and supportive as a positive home environment will make children feel happy. The participants mentioned that children will feel unsafe, cold, and hungry if they do not have a house to live in. One participant also mentioned that living in a household with too many family members could have a negative influence on children.

4.3.4 Other resources needed in a child's life

Besides the basic needs required for a child to live well, the participants emphasised several other resources in a child's environment that will support children's well-being. These resources include books to read, access to appropriate bathrooms and sanitation, the availability of transport, and having electronic devices, electricity, and the opportunity to play with toys.

- Some participants were of opinion that books are an important educational resource for children as it helps to build children's general knowledge, increase their vocabulary, and teach them academic knowledge and skills which could benefit a child in the future.
- The participants emphasised the importance of sanitation and clean bathrooms for children to live well. Not having access to working sanitation and appropriate bathrooms can harm children's health and overall well-being. Children can become sick when exposed to dirty bathrooms and bathrooms without working sanitation.
- The availability of transport was raised as a factor that has an influence on children's well-being. Transport is important for children to travel to places such as schools and shops. Children who walk long distances will be cold, their feet will hurt, and they will have less time to bath and sleep. Having transport provides children with the advantages of ensuring safety, privacy, comfort and saving time.
- Electronic devices, such as cellphones, laptops and televisions were mentioned as an important resource for children. These devices have advantages such as staying in contact with family and friends, calling for help when in trouble, doing research for schoolwork or using them for entertainment. Some participants mentioned risks involved in the use of electronic devices, for example spending too much time on it and being exposed to negative and inappropriate content on social media, television and through text messages, which are harmful to the child's well-being.
- The participants saw electricity as necessary for children to live well as without it, children and families will not be able to perform tasks which are important for children to live well, for example preparing food, reading, or doing homework. Without electricity, children may also feel scared in the dark.
- Toys were seen as important for providing children with the opportunity to play. The participants mentioned a variety of toys as examples and one participant indicated that all children should know how it feels like to play with toys.

4.3.5 Access to services and resources in the community

The participants indicated services and resources in children's communities that were needed for them to live well. These services include shops, healthcare services, a school, church, outside play areas and fire stations.

- Shops that would sell different products such as food, clothing, and medicine (a pharmacy would help to enhance the well-being of a child. Shops help in meeting the basic needs of children, which are important for children to live well.

- The participants explained that medical and healthcare services such as hospitals and dentists, doctors and nurses are important to enhance children's health. Children who are sick or injured can receive help from professionals who help people to become healthy and strong and help them to live well.
- Schools were explained by the participants as the place that provides the child with the opportunity to learn and get an education that will help them to get a job when they are adults. Schools also provide children with opportunities to make friends which positively contribute to a child feeling happy and well. Children who are not attending school will not become smart, will be sad and will experience risks to being unemployed in future.
- The participants emphasised the positive effects of attending church. They were of opinion that people who attend church, are provided with the opportunity to learn about God, to follow the right path, and to trust in God, which will help to improve their lives.
- Public parks, playgrounds and play areas were seen as enhancing children's well-being as they provide children with the opportunity to play outside. The participants explained that spending time playing in clean parks or play areas is fun, increases children's happiness, reduces stress, and improves their physical development.
- A fire station was important to some participants. Firefighting services can react quickly when people's houses are on fire and prevent people from losing their houses in the fire.

4.3.6 The quality of the environment

The participants explained that a positive and clean environment is an important aspect that could contribute to children's well-being.

- A safe, favourable, and clean environment with plants and flowers and no litter and rubbish lying around is needed for children to live well. A clean environment enhances children's health and emotions. A dirty and polluted environment will have negative effects on children's health. An environment without pollution will not only benefit human beings, but animals and small organisms as well.
- The participants explained that water and air pollution will influence people's health and are harmful to the environment and all living beings. Pollution of rivers and oceans by materials such as plastic, metal, and paper causes people to become sick and kill fish and other water organisms that people need for food. Air pollution because of smoke from factories and from fires that people make, causes people to get sick, for example affect their lungs.

- The participants believed that a clean environment is so important that people must work together to implement strategies to keep the environment clean and safe, which will benefit all living beings and enhance their well-being.

4.3.7 Children can be involved in their own well-being

The participants believed children could be involved in enhancing child well-being in different ways.

- Children could enhance the well-being of children by being kind, considerate, and helpful towards other children who are less fortunate than them.
- Children can also take responsibility for their own well-being by getting enough sleep, eating healthy food, doing their homework, being active and helping animals, which will make them feel happy.
- Helping around the house, doing chores, and helping their parents will benefit children's well-being in many ways as children learn new skills and responsibilities which they can use in the future.
- Children can also help to keep their neighbourhood clean as a clean environment makes children feel good. They can pick up rubbish in their neighbourhood as well as recycle and throw litter in dustbins and not on the ground.

Adults such as children's parents can help improve the well-being of children by helping them to achieve something by themselves.

- The participants thought that parents can teach children new skills. To do this, parents can include children in everyday tasks around the house. Helping parents with chores provide children with the opportunity to learn new skills and responsibilities which they can use in the future, and which will make parents proud of their children.
- Children will also get opportunities to experience success when parents give them certain responsibilities in the home. Parents can give recognition to children for helping by giving the child a small reward.

4.4 CONCLUSIONS

In this section, the following conclusions are based on the findings of the study and the literature review:

- Child well-being is a multi-dimensional concept that includes aspects such as children's physical, emotional, social, educational, and environmental well-being. Children in middle

childhood are aware of the importance of the different aspects for children's well-being and of their influence on one another, for example that a child who is healthy will be happy. Adults can therefore obtain valuable information about children's well-being by listening to children.

- Children in middle childhood are also aware that one can determine whether a child is well by observing aspects such as the child's emotions, health, physical appearance, and achievements. Children tend to relate factors that enhance children's well-being by whether it will make children feel happy.
- As suggested by the ecological systems theory, the child's microsystem plays the most important role in children's well-being. What stands out is the central role of the parents in taking care of and providing love for the child. Parents play the role of educator, supporter, caretaker, and provider in the child's needs. The presence of both parents is important for children. However, many South African children live with one parent only.
- Parents must create a positive home environment for children. It is important that the home is safe and with enough space for the family members. However, the atmosphere in the home must be positive if it is to enhance children's well-being. Positive relationships among siblings can support children's well-being and receiving love and acceptance from pets contributes to children's happiness.
- Positive relationships with grandparents and members of the extended family with whom children have regular contact can enhance children's well-being. These family members do not have to care for children but can spend time with them that children experience as positive and supportive. It must be kept in mind that many children in South Africa are in the care of grandparents or other family members.
- Other microsystems that form part of the child's immediate environment can support children's well-being. Teachers have a strong influence on children's learning and on their emotional well-being. Friends can provide children with friendship, a sense of belonging and support, which will make children feel happy.
- Children's basic needs must be met to ensure their well-being. These include the need for proper housing, adequate nutrition, clean drinkable water, adequate clothing, and physical activity and sport. The well-being of large numbers of children in South Africa is negatively affected by the fact that their basic needs are not being met. Many children live in inadequate or overcrowded houses, experience hunger and malnutrition, and do not have access to clean water.

- Other resources such as good sanitation, the availability of transport, electricity, books to read and toys to play with, and electronic devices contribute to children's well-being. Many children in South Africa lack these resources, for example, many families cannot afford these resources because of the high prevalence of poverty in South Africa.
- Children must have access to community resources such as schools, hospitals, churches, shops, and safe public play areas. Research shows that not all children have access to good health care in South Africa and that crime and violence make public spaces unsafe for them.
- Children are aware of the importance of a clean and unpolluted environment for their well-being and want to contribute to preventing water, air and environmental pollution. Environmental aspects also receive increased interest from professional people and in policies.
- Children are a vulnerable group, however literature on child well-being emphasise that all children have the capacity to grow in their environments. Adults must provide children with opportunities to enhance their well-being.
- Children want to be involved in enhancing their own well-being and that of other children. They can achieve this by taking on responsibilities in the home, looking after their own well-being and helping children who are less fortunate than them. Parents can improve children's well-being by involving them in tasks that teach them new skills and acknowledging their efforts to allow them to experience a sense of mastery.
- Efforts to enhance children's well-being must have a strong focus on the microsystem as the ecological level in which the child is directly involved, and that will have the strongest influence of the child. However, children's well-being is influenced by the quality of all the ecological levels in their environment, for example poverty or access to services. Interventions to enhance children's well-being must therefore be based on an ecological perspective in which the influence of all levels are considered.
- Enhancing the well-being of children can prepare them to function well later in life. Children's resilience can be enhanced by improving conditions in their environment. Therefore, making children's well-being a priority can contribute to sustainable futures for children to live with dignity and free from poverty.

4.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher presents the recommendation in this section, which can be considered by social workers, especially those who are rendering services to children and families. The

recommendations might provide meaningful information to social workers for developing interventions that will contribute to the well-being of children in the short-term and for the future. The recommendations may also be relevant to other professionals who work with children.

- Enhancing children's well-being must be a priority for social workers and other professionals working with children. Enhancing well-being during the childhood years can lead to sustainable futures for children, in which the cycle of negative circumstances in which many children live will be stopped.
- The perspectives of children on child well-being should be fully acknowledged and taken into consideration in planning interventions for child well-being. The well-being of children should be understood from the perspectives of children and not from adult perspectives only. Social workers should be informed about the different views of children on child well-being and the effects it can have on children when needs are not met.
- Taking the influence of factors in the different ecological levels in the child's environment into consideration, it is recommended that social workers implement programmes and services at the micro, mezzo and macro levels to improve the well-being of children, as indicated for developmental social work services.
- As children are influenced daily by social factors in the child's micro system, services on this level must be developed to strengthen families, including parents, grandparents, extended family members and teachers. The following are examples of information that social workers can present to these role-players:
 - Information on how to properly care and provide in the needs of the child by developing programmes to enhance parenting skills as well as raise awareness on the importance of meeting the needs of the child.
 - Providing children with the opportunity for participation by helping children to communicate their ideas and talk about problems. Helping children to express themselves will also benefit them in the future. Parents, teachers, and other adults need to be available and make time to listen to the child's needs.
 - Parents must acknowledge that both parents must be involved in the child's life, even when separated, to help enhance the child's well-being and fulfill their parental responsibilities.
- Social workers must act as advocates for children's well-being. Information on child well-being should be widely accessible to individuals, families, groups and communities as all people can contribute to children's well-being. Awareness and educational programmes

can be presented at schools, churches, community centres and welfare organisations to be accessible to everyone, including those individuals who have no access to cell phones or any electronic devices.

- Social workers can enhance access to resources for children and families in need, for example families living in poverty or with unemployment. These resources can be in the form of donations such as clothing, food or water, or in the form of social assistance.
- It is also important that a focus is placed on the resources and services in the communities, for example access to schools, hospitals, churches, and fire stations to ensure functional and the best quality services for children and families. Delivery good quality services may also motivate service providers to further improve their ability to provide optimal and quality services.
- As children's well-being is multi-dimensional, social workers need to look at the child holistically and look at the availability of services and resources to ensure that the different needs of children are met. Social workers must, for example, consider aspects such as socio-economic factors such as poverty, adequate nutrition and food programmes, access to healthcare services and proper housing. Social workers therefore have to look out for the well-being of vulnerable groups, for example children living in poor communities or communities with high levels of crime and violence. They must involve community members as, without knowledge obtained from inside the community, the social workers may not fully understand the impact of the different social problems in children's and families' lives.
- Opportunities can be created for enhancing community connections where families and children can meet other families and children and get to know them, create a safe neighbourhood where members can support each other and become aware of where to find the resources they need.
- Social workers and other professional persons should include environmental well-being in their scope of interventions to help children to live in a clean natural environment. They need to educate people in the community on how to minimize pollution and the potential harm to the environment to help improve children's well-being. Social workers have the responsibility to be advocates for children's rights and to protect them and keep them safe.
- Children have suggestions on how to improve their well-being. Social workers need to take these suggestions as very important especially when they want to make decisions on

behalf of children. They can involve children at schools to raise their voices on what they want to be done or by letting them be practically involved in enhancing children's well-being. Social workers can, for example, arrange for specific days when all children bring food, old clothes or books to enhance the well-being of less fortunate children.

- As children have the best knowledge regarding their needs, social workers can arrange discussion groups in schools, churches, or welfare organisations for children to talk about their perspectives on child well-being and to implement this knowledge in awareness programmes. These programmes can provide other important people, for example those in welfare organisations or involved in policy, with information regarding children's views on how their well-being can be improved.

The following recommendations are made for future research:

- More South African studies need to be conducted on children's subjective well-being, thus on their perspectives about factors that can have an impact on child well-being.
- More studies can be conducted with children from different age groups, from different cultures and in different socio-cultural contexts and environmental conditions.

In the next section, the researcher will indicate how the goal and objectives that were set out for this study were achieved.

4.6 ACCOMPLISHMENT OF GOAL OF THE STUDY

The goal of the study was to explore children's perspectives on child well-being as a pathway to a sustainable future within the South African context. This goal was achieved by the accomplishment of the objectives for the study.

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

The first objective was achieved by the presentation of the literature review in Chapter 2 of the research report. The researcher provided information on the concept of child well-being, indicators of child well-being, factors that influence child well-being and legislative frameworks relevant to the well-being of children. In Chapter 1, the researcher discussed the ecological systems theory of Urie Bronfenbrenner that formed the theoretical framework of the study.

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

This objective was achieved by exploring how the participants in the study viewed child well-being. The participants explained that children will be well by referring to aspects such as

children being happy, healthy, cared for, loved and successful, which could be observed in children's non-verbal behaviour and their appearance.

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

During the data collection interviews, children's views were explored related to social aspects that are related to children's well-being. The children's views on the importance of the family, extended family, grandparents, pets, teachers, and friends, amongst others, were presented in Chapter 3. Thereby, Objective 3 has been achieved.

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

The participants described factors related to meeting children's basic needs, for example having a home, appropriate nutrition, clean water, and proper clothing, which they regarded as important for children's well-being. They furthermore believed that aspects such as transport, electricity, and having books and toys will make children happy, and thus enhance their well-being. The participants also referred to community resources that children would need, including a school, church, healthcare services and safe public spaces. With the presentation of these research results in Chapter 3, the researcher could achieve Objective 4.

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

Objective 5 was achieved by presenting the participants' views on the natural environment. The participants showed awareness that a clean and unpolluted environment was required for children's current and future well-being. For them, it was important that children and other people implement measures to protect the natural environment to support the health of people and animals.

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

This objective was achieved by obtaining the participants' views on how children can be involved in enhancing child well-being and presenting the research findings in Chapter 3. It was evident that the participants were in favour of children taking part in efforts to enhance their own well-being and that of other children. They also made suggestions that parents should empower children to take more responsibility for themselves and their well-being.

The achievement of the goal and objectives of the research study enabled the researcher to

answer the research question of the study, which was stated as follows: “*What are children’s perspectives on child well-being as a pathway to sustainable futures within the South African context?*” The researcher concludes the research by means of the concluding statement.

4.7 CONCLUDING STATEMENT

This study was intended to gain an understanding of children’s perspectives on child well-being within a South African context and how it can form a pathway to sustainable futures for children. The perspectives of children regarding their subjective well-being, thus child participation, was a crucial part in the study. The researcher gained insight into children’s views on child well-being and realised that children can provide valuable information that social workers and other professional persons can consider in interventions to enhance child well-being. Social workers must view children’s well-being in a holistic way to include all domains of well-being and must adopt an ecological perspective to consider all factors in children’s environment that can affect their well-being either positively or negatively. Child well-being gains increasing attention in research and more studies on the topic can be valuable to guide services to enhance children’s 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
---	---	----	----	----

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

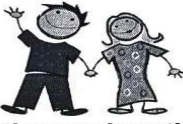
1. How will you know if it is going well with a child?
(e.g. emotions, health, physical wellness, positive development, doing well at school, care by parents)
2. Who (which people) should be in a child's life for a child to live well?
(e.g. family, parents, grandparents, extended family, siblings, teachers, 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 wellbeing?

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.

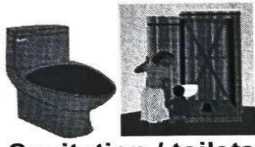
Thank you for sharing your views with me. It is important that we engage children as it will help us to plan programmes and services that will improve the well-being of many children in South Africa.

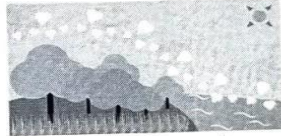
APPENDIX B

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

Letter of informed assent



Researcher: Simoné van Vuuren (15042392)
Degree: MSW Play-based Intervention
Contact details: 082 669 7846

PARTICIPANT'S INFORMED ASSENT FORM

Dear participant



My name is Simoné van Vuuren 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 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 082 669 7846 or send me an email at simonevanvuuren@outlook.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

APPENDIX D

Letter of informed consent



Researcher: Simoné van Vuuren (15042392)
Degree: MSW Play-based Intervention
Contact details: 082 669 7846

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
- 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 wellbeing 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 simonevanvuuren@outlook.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

Ethical clearance from the research ethics committee



Faculty of Humanities

Fakulteit Geesteswetenskappe,
L1-lapha la Bomotheo

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2 September 2021

Dear Miss S van Vuuren

Project Title:	Children's perspectives on well-being: A pathway to sustainable futures
Researcher:	Miss S van Vuuren
Supervisor(s):	Dr MP le Roux
Department:	Social Work and Criminology
Reference number:	15042392 (HUM033/0821)
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