

**PARENTS' EXPERIENCES OF REUNIFICATION SERVICES DURING
PLACEMENT OF THEIR CHILDREN IN CHILD AND YOUTH CARE CENTRES:
PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR SOCIAL WORKERS**

by

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PARENTS' EXPERIENCES OF REUNIFICATION SERVICES DURING PLACEMENT OF THEIR CHILDREN IN CHILD AND YOUTH CARE CENTRES: PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR SOCIAL WORKERS

I declare that the above dissertation is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the dissertation to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.



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DEDICATION

This study is wholeheartedly dedicated to my mother Makgata Matshediso Seapose who have been my source of inspiration and encouraged me when I thought of giving up, who continually provide her moral, spiritual, emotional and financial support.

I also dedicate this dissertation to the Almighty God. Thank you for the guidance, strength, power of mind, protection and benefits and for giving me a healthy life. All this helped me in completing my studies.

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ABSTRACT

Due to the increasing number of children in need of care and protection in South Africa, the majority of these children are removed from the care of their parents and placed at child and youth care centres (CYCCs) for proper care and protection. Little is known about the reunification services for parents whose children are in these centres. Therefore, exploring and describing parents' experiences of reunification services during placement of their children in CYCCs was of great importance to develop practice guidelines for social workers.

This research used the qualitative research approach guided by an explorative, descriptive and contextual research design. A sample of participants was drawn through purposive sampling and data was collected by means of semi-structured interviews assisted by an interview guide consisting of open-ended questions. Data analysis was conducted using Tesch's eight steps as cited in Creswell (2014:198) and data was verified according to Guba's model cited in Krefting (1990:214–222). Informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, management of information and debriefing of participants were considered as ethical considerations. Recommendations were made regarding reunification services, practice guidelines for social workers and future research.

Key words: Child, Child and youth care centres (CYCCs), Experience, Family reunification, Reunification services, Parent, Practice guidelines

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION	II
DEDICATION	III
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	IV
ABSTRACT	6
LIST OF TABLES	14
LIST OF ACRONYMS	14
1.1. INTRODUCTION, PROBLEM FORMULATION, RATIONALE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	15
1.1.1. Introduction	15
1.1.2. Problem formulation	20
1.1.3. The study's rationale	23
1.1.4. Theoretical framework	24
1.2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES	28
1.2.1. Research questions	28
1.2.2. Research goals	28
1.2.3. Research objectives	29
1.3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	30
1.3.1. Research approach	30

1.3.2. Research design	31
1.4. RESEARCH METHOD	32
1.4.1. Population	32
1.4.2. Sampling and sampling methods	33
1.4.3. Data collection	34
1.4.3.1. <i>Preparation for data collection</i>	34
1.4.3.2. <i>Methods of data collection</i>	35
1.4.3.3. Pilot testing	36
1.4.4. Methods of data analysis	36
1.4.5. Data verification	37
1.5. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	39
1.5.1. Informed consent	40
1.5.2. Confidentiality and anonymity	40
1.5.3. Management of information	41
1.5.4. Debriefing of participants	41
1.6. CLARIFICATION OF KEY CONCEPTS	41
1.6.1. Child	41

1.6.2. Child and youth care centres (CYCCs)	42
1.6.3. Experience	42
1.6.4. Family reunification	43
1.6.5. Reunification services	43
1.6.6. Social work	43
1.6.7. Parent	44
1.6.8. Practice guidelines	44
1.7. STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT	44
1.8. CHAPTER SUMMARY	45
CHAPTER 2: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	46
2.1. INTRODUCTION	46
2.2. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESEARCH APPROACH	47
2.3. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN	49
2.4. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESEARCH METHOD	50
2.4.1. Population	50
2.4.2. Sampling and sampling methods	51
2.5. IMPLEMENTATION OF DATA COLLECTION	53

2.5.1. Preparation for data collection	53
2.6. METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION	54
2.6.1. Pilot testing	57
2.7. METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS USED	58
2.8. METHODS OF DATA VERIFICATION USED	59
2.9. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS IMPLEMENTED	62
2.9.1. Informed consent	62
2.9.2. Confidentiality and anonymity	62
2.9.3. Management of information	63
2.9.4. Debriefing of participants	63
2.10. CHAPTER SUMMARY	64
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND LITERATURE CONTROL	65
3.1. INTRODUCTION	65
3.2. BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE OF THE PARTICIPANTS	65
3.2.1. Age distribution and marital status of participants	66
3.2.2. Gender distribution of participants	67
3.2.3. Population distribution of participants	67

3.2.4. Economic status of participants	68
3.3. IDENTIFYING DETAILS OF THE PARTICIPANTS AND CHILDREN	68
3.3.1. Participants' number of children in CYCC and how they were related	69
3.3.2. Length of time participants' children stayed in CYCC at time of interview	69
3.4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS IN RELATION TO LITERATURE	72
THEME 1: PARTICIPANTS' DESCRIPTIONS OF HOW AND WHY THEIR CHILD/REN HAD BEEN REMOVED FROM THEIR CARE	74
THEME 2: PARTICIPANTS' ACCOUNTS OF WHEN AND WHY THEY VISITED THEIR CHILDREN IN THE CYCC	78
THEME 3: PARTICIPANTS' ACCOUNTS OF THE FREQUENCY OF THEIR CHILD/REN'S VISITS TO THEIR HOMES	84
THEME 4: PARTICIPANTS' DESCRIPTIONS OF THEIR EXPERIENCES OF REUNIFICATION SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE FIELD SOCIAL WORKER	87
THEME 5: PARTICIPANTS' DESCRIPTIONS OF THEIR EXPERIENCES OF REUNIFICATION SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE CYCC SOCIAL WORKER	94
THEME 6: PARTICIPANTS' DESCRIPTIONS OF THEIR NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS IN TERMS OF REUNIFICATION SERVICES	99
THEME 7: PARTICIPANTS' RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING REUNIFICATION SERVICES PROVIDED BY SOCIAL WORKERS	106
3.5. CHAPTER SUMMARY	111

CHAPTER 4: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	113
4.1. INTRODUCTION	113
4.2. SUMMARY OF THE PREVIOUS CHAPTERS	114
4.3. SUMMARIES, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS RELATING TO THE RESEARCH STUDY	114
4.3.1. Summary and conclusion relating to the research process	114
4.3.2. Summary and conclusions drawn from the research findings	116
THEME 1: PARTICIPANTS' DESCRIPTIONS OF HOW AND WHY THEIR CHILD/REN WERE REMOVED FROM THEIR CARE	116
THEME 2: PARTICIPANTS' ACCOUNTS OF WHEN THEY VISITED THEIR CHILDREN IN THE CYCC AND WHY	117
THEME 3: PARTICIPANTS' ACCOUNTS OF THE FREQUENCY OF THEIR CHILD/REN'S VISITS TO THEIR HOMES	118
THEME 4: PARTICIPANTS' DESCRIPTIONS OF THEIR EXPERIENCES OF REUNIFICATION SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE FIELD SOCIAL WORKER	119
THEME 5: PARTICIPANTS' DESCRIPTIONS OF THEIR EXPERIENCES OF REUNIFICATION SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE CYCC SOCIAL WORKER	120
THEME 6: PARTICIPANTS' DESCRIPTIONS OF THEIR NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS IN TERMS OF REUNIFICATION SERVICES	122
THEME 7: PARTICIPANTS' RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING REUNIFICATION SERVICES PROVIDED BY SOCIAL WORKERS	124

4.4. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	125
4.5. RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON THE RESEARCH STUDY	126
4.5.1. Recommendations regarding reunification services	126
4.5.2. Practice guidelines for social workers	127
4.5.3. Recommendations for further research	129
4.6. CHAPTER SUMMARY	129
REFERENCES	130
ADDENDUM A: REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION OF TSHWANE MUNICIPALITY	152
ADDENDUM B: REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION AT CHILD AND YOUTH CARE CENTRE (CYCC)	154
ADDENDUM C: INFORMATION AND INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT	156
ADDENDUM D: ETHICAL CONSENT FORM	157
ADDENDUM E: CONSENT FORM REQUESTING PERMISSION TO PUBLISH AUDIOTAPES AND VERBATIM TRANSCRIPTS OF AUDIOTAPE RECORDINGS	163
ADDENDUM F: STATEMENTS AND DECLARATIONS STATEMENT BY OR ON BEHALF OF INVESTIGATOR(S)	164
ADDENDUM G: IMPORTANT MESSAGE TO PARTICIPANT/REPRESENTATIVE OF PARTICIPANT	165
ADDENDUM H: ACCEPTANCE LETTER FROM DEBRIEFER	166
ADDENDUM I: APPLICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT	167

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1: Biographical profile of the participants

Table 3.2: Identifying details of participants and children

Table 3.3: Overview: themes, sub-themes and categories

LIST OF ACRONYMS

BSW	Bachelor of Social Work
CYCC	Child and youth care centre
DSD	Department of Social Development
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus or acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
HODs	Heads of the Departments
IFSW	International Federation of Social Workers
Sabinet	South African Bibliographic and Information
SACSSP	South African Council for Social Service Professions
SWREC	Social Work Research Ethics Committee
UNISA	University of South Africa
UN	United Nations
UK	United Kingdom

CHAPTER 1: GENERAL INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1. INTRODUCTION, PROBLEM FORMULATION, RATIONALE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study focuses on parents' experience-based perceptions of reunification services during the placement of their children in child and youth care centres (CYCCs). Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the background information, problem formulation, motivation for the study and theoretical framework. It also covers the research questions, research goals and objectives that provide direction to the study, followed by the research methodology, research methods, ethical considerations, clarification of key concepts and the structure of the research report.

1.1.1. Introduction

Parents have been responsible for taking care of their children since ancient times (Ferracioli 2018:77). In most societies, this responsibility is primarily taken up by women and mothers (Peng & Wong 2016:272). However, due to the growing number of children needing to be cared for and protected, as explained by the Children's Act 38 of 2005 (South Africa 2006) (the Children's Act), the majority of these children are eventually taken away from their parental care and are put into CYCCs. Section 87 of the Children's Act defines a CYCC as a facility for providing residential care to more than six children outside of the child's home environment in line with a residential care programme made specifically for the children residing in the facility. CYCCs include children's homes, shelters, safe havens, secure care facilities, and vocational schools. The Department of Social Development (DSD) Children's Court Practice Note (2010:6-11) states that partial care facilities, boarding schools, school hostels or other residential facilities connected to a school, prisons, or any other establishments that are maintained primarily for the tuition or training of children, aside from establishments that are maintained for children who are ordered by the court to receive tuition or training, are not included in the CYCC category.

According to Freeman (2013:101), the development of institutional homes in the 1700s, the emergence of camps and clubs in the early 1900s because of the industrial revolution and an increase in immigration, as well as the contexts of residential care, hospitals, and juvenile justice programmes, all point to the origins of child and youth care as a distinct field. Freeman (2013:101) further states that residential and group care in Northern America expanded in the 1950s and 1960s, leading to increased expertise and understanding of human growth.

Globally, millions of children are put in residential treatment centres due to abuse, violence, exploitation and neglect (Rock, cited in Healy & Link 2012:143). In the Czech Republic, for example, institutional care is implemented when biological parents do not want to or are unable to care for their children, and there were over 6000 children receiving institutional care in the nation in 2018 (Stenclova 2019:8). On March 31, 2019, there were 78 150 children in local authority care in England, with 12% of them living in secure facilities or children's homes, primarily due to abuse or neglect (Hamilton 2021:141), while in Scotland, a sizable proportion of children and adolescents in care have experienced abuse (physical, sexual, or psychological) and/or neglect (Carrà 2014:254). Approximately 415 129 children and youth in North America were in out-of-home care, including residential treatment centres (CYCCs) and group homes (Pecora & English 2016:5). Younger children are placed into care in Sweden, as well as many other nations, because of parental drug and alcohol misuse, severe mental health issues, domestic violence, neglect, and ineffective parenting (Andersson 2018:1). Being a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Zimbabwe's government agreed to give separated children further protection, making sure there is acceptable alternative family care or institutional placement available. (Mhongera & Lombard 2018:55). This suggests that large numbers of children who require care and protection and have been placed in residential centres or CYCCs across the globe.

There are large numbers of vulnerable and orphaned youngsters and children in South Africa, and despite progressive child protection legislation, many families and children's homes face difficulties in protecting and caring for their children (Hendricks & Tanga 2019:32).

Agere, Tanga and Kang'ethe (2017:77) point out that while statistics on children cared for in institutions in South Africa are incomplete, it is known that there are 21 000 children living in institutions and that there are 345 registered child and youth care centres in the country caring for these children. In South Africa, safeguarding children from abuse, exploitation and violence is not only a fundamental principle, but also a duty that is outlined in the Bill of Rights, which is a part of the South African Constitution (Salim & Lombard 2020:191). Moreover, South Africa has undergone significant change, and numerous laws and regulations have been created to remedy the shortcomings of the past, particularly when it comes to the protection of children (Johannisen, Van Wyk & Yates 2021:377). However, children may still require care and protection as a result of the severe adverse circumstances and will then be placed in alternative care such as CYCCs (Johannisen, Van Wyk & Yates 2021:377). Child protection services encompasses not only proceedings in children's courts and the execution of court orders, but also prevention, early intervention and reunification services (Van Niekerk & Matthias 2019:239; Truter & Fouché 2019:451). Van Niekerk and Matthias (2019:239) state that, despite legislative and regulatory changes pertaining to children's rights and safety, child abuse and neglect continue to be a major problem in South Africa. Furthermore, the number of investigations into children requiring protection and care in South Africa has overwhelmed child protection services (Shiller & Strydom 2018:407).

The Children's Act's Section 150 describes when a child needs care and protection, including when he/she has been abandoned, neglected or unfairly treated; shows some form of uncontrollable behaviour; begs for a living, or lives or works on the streets; is dependent on substances and has no support for the treatment of such dependency; is being exploited; or may be exposed to more risks if reunited with a parent, guardian or caregiver.

The DSD standard operational plan no. 1 (2022c:2–3) refers to the following procedure that the responsible social workers (field social worker) should follow to identify and refer children who need care and protection:

- Receive the completed forms 22 and 25 from people who are mandated to report child abuse cases.
- Interview the child and family within 48 hours. In cases of rape, it needs to

be done within 24 hours.

- Assess the child's vulnerability and safety.
- Decide whether temporary safe care needs to be considered.
- Choose a CYCC or other secure location where the child should be put.
- Choose a family or facility that is as near as feasible to the location where the child was found.
- The developmental needs of the child need to be considered when considering a placement.
- Escort the child to the facility of safe care.
- Fill out form 36 (old form 4) if the child needs urgent placement, especially after hours.
- Inform the juvenile court and family of the urgent removal within 24 hours.
- Provide a copy of form 36 to the facility (CYCC), the parents and the juvenile's court.
- Prepare the child for the alternative care placement.
- Ensure that the field social worker who carries out these steps (if it is not the same person) is linked with the child.
- Open a case at the South African Police Service for possible commission of an offence.

Children put in a CYCC for care and protection should receive services as outlined in Section 191 of the Children's Act, including a safe, regulated environment for the growth, development and care of the children; where they can be protected from further harm, be observed and assessed, receive therapeutic support, and be assisted in being reunited with their families and community. Children should be exposed to programmes according to their needs e.g., rehabilitation programmes, behavioural modification programmes, programmes for children with disability and programmes aimed at assisting people experiencing challenges when leaving CYCCs.

It is clear from the previous paragraphs that both field social workers and social workers employed by CYCCs have responsibilities to fulfil towards children placed in a CYCC

and their families. The DSD employee performance agreement and development plan (2022b) elaborates on the key responsibilities for intake and field social workers, namely:

- to render or conduct social work assistance to their clients (individuals, families, groups and communities) in terms of Acts, policies and legislature.
- to perform administrative functions relevant to social work services; and
- to render social welfare prevention and promotion programmes.

Children in the CYCC must get social work help from CYCC social workers, implementing prevention and awareness programmes for children, and performing social work administrative functions. In addition, the South African Government's *Blue print, minimum norms and standards for secure care facilities in South Africa* (DSD 2010a:68) refers to the specific roles and responsibilities of centre social workers, activities involve welcoming the child to the facility, helping them adjust to their new surroundings, and making plans for their near future, which includes compiling an individual development plan with relevant role players who are part of the initial assessment. The document further prescribes that the centre social worker should facilitate group work, family group conferences and reunification services for children and their parents.

Reunification in this context refers to the services rendered with the intention of reunifying children placed at the CYCCs with their parents or families (Carnochan, Lee & Austin 2013:179). Furthermore, reunification is defined in the Revised White Paper on Families in South Africa (DSD 2021:13) as the reunion of family members who have been estranged for a long time due to a variety of factors. Moreover, reunification services are thus highly significant because CYCCs do not accommodate children on a permanent basis as their intent is to return them to their parents or family of origin at some stage. Social workers from the field and CYCCs should provide these kinds of services to parents, or other family members, to ensure a smooth transition and integration between them (parents/family) and the child placed at the CYCCs. Sauls and Esau (2015:14), based on their research to evaluate the reunification services for families in the Western Cape, state that a successful reunification is having no further separations or removals of youngsters and children and the family living up to the social worker's expectations.

CYCCs have been taking care of children in need of care and protection for an extended time. Some of these children have been in these institutions for more than 10 years due to difficulties in reunification with their family of origin (Hazen, Carlson, Cartwright, Patnode, Cole-Mossman, Byrns, Hauptman, & Osofsky 2021:24-25).

In the United Kingdom (UK), the reunification process, which starts at the point of admission, is often prolonged, and “more than one-third (35%) of children exiting care subsequently re-entered within five years” (Hood, Abbott, Nilsson, Baginsky & Dimond 2022:10). Around 25% of the children who started the family reunion process in Spain, returned to the child protection system within a year while the children reunited with their families were between 37% and 65% and eventually, they returned to child protection system (Bailón, Inchaurredo, Monclús, & Tió 2018:2). Unfortunately, in most cases, reunification does not happen as quickly as parents may want and, on average, just under 43% of children were reunified with their families within twelve months after they were removed (D’Andrade & Nguyen 2014:51–52). This implies that there is a lower percentage of children who are unified effectively with their parents or families than the percentage that unsuccessfully reunified.

The next part outlines the problem formulation.

1.1.2. Problem formulation

Children are being put in CYCCs on a temporary basis with the view of returning them to their parents at a later stage. However, Neil, Gitsels and Thoburn (2020:548) state that, reunification with parents is highly unsuccessful; even when children do not re-enter care, outcomes for them can be poor. This means that the majority of children are not successfully reunited with their families. Moreover, Trout, Lambert, Thompson, Duppong Hurley and Tyler (2019:2) assert that despite legislation highlighting the importance of support systems to families, there are still challenges to supporting families with reunification services, and children thus remain at risk of entering the child welfare system yet again. They add that there is lack of evidence of aftercare support and a significant lack of reunification of children and families following placements in residential care (Trout et al 2019:2).

Frimpong-Manso, Agbadi and Deliege (2022:2) claim that the child's wishes are often not considered during reunification, and social workers lack financial and human resources to offer follow-up services to the reunited families. The aim of reunification services is to address challenges and problems related to parenting and family functioning that resulted in child abuse, and to reunify such children with their parents and families (Osterling, Lee & Hines 2012: 330). For this reason, reunification services to children placed in CYCCs with their parents and families are of the utmost importance.

Although Osterling et al (2012:332–333) outline various reunification services, namely, parental training, substance abuse treatment and mental health treatment, the focus is more Eurocentric and little is known about more Afrocentric reunification. The majority of studies conducted on reunification services for children placed in care institutions have been conducted outside the borders of South Africa (Osterlin et al 2012:330–353; Carnochan, Lee & Austin 2013:179–190). Frimpong-Manso et al (2022:1) state that “there is little proof on family reunification for children who have been in residential care within the African context”. The authors further state that, information on “the factors that influence the stability of family reunification for children who have been in residential care are limited” (Frimpong-Manso et al 2022:1). Concerns were raised by D’Andrade and Nguyen (2014:62) regarding assessment of parenting programmes frequently used in child welfare situations in the United States of America, which revealed no scientific support for the utility and efficacy of reunification services.

Several research studies were conducted globally regarding children entering care and their placements, but information about returning them to their parents or reunification services remained scarce (Farmer & Wijedasa 2013:1612). “Despite the fundamental role of services and service use in reunification, there is surprisingly little empirical research on the topic” (D’Andrade & Nguyen 2014:52). Furthermore, there has not been a lot of attention given to other services such as family preservation or to effective family reunification practices (Lietz & Hodge 2011:2). According to Wong (2016:3), internationally little is known about studies done on parents’ experiences with the child reunification process; these studies are also lacking in Hong Kong.

Within the South African context, the Guidelines on reunification services for families (DSD 2012:23) acknowledges that reunification as an outcome might not be achieved in all families; however, contact opportunities are important as they promote the building of family relationships as support systems to their members. Therefore, the success of reunification and reintegration relies on the availability, willingness and capability of families and communities to receive and support those being integrated. In most instances, a history of abuse, domestic violence, severe mental illness and drug abuse might limit a family's chances of being reunified with its members, thereby presenting unique challenges to the processes of reunification (DSD 2012:23).

Evaluation of family reunification conducted by the Western Cape DSD (DSD 2015:23–26) identified the following challenges and risk factors for family reunification:

- High caseloads and excessive administrative duties;
- Limited support services and lack of focus on caregivers;
- High social work turnover and inexperienced social workers;
- Challenges in tracking parents;
- Dealing with uninvolved and unmotivated caregivers; and
- Poor collaboration between CYCC and external social workers in the reunification process.

Based on this evaluation, it was clear that reunification is a neglected and under-resourced area of child protection practice, owing to social workers' high caseloads related to child maltreatment, which results in constant crisis intervention and a focus on statutory services (DSD 2015:30). The challenges and risk factors listed above were evidence enough that social workers were unable to provide families with the required support services during the critical first twelve months following the reunification process. If the caregivers' only support is a social worker, the prospect of a successful reunification appears to decrease (DSD 2015:31).

Parents will have the best understanding of the services offered with a view towards reunifying families. The researcher and the discipline librarian did internet database searches using search engines such as Google Scholar, the Nexus database and the South African

Bibliographic and Information Network (Sabinet), as including the sites of international journal database like EBSCOhost and ScienceDirect, which showed a lack of studies on parents' experiences of reunification services during placement of their children in CYCCs. These search results were confirmed by Wong (2016:3), referred to above, who indicated that internationally little is known about studies done on parents' experiences with the child reunification process. Except for one DSD document (Guideline on reunification services for families), no practice guidelines could be found for field and centre social workers rendering reunification services to parents during placement of their children in CYCCs.

Therefore, the problem statement of this study reads as follows: *there is a lack of knowledge of parents' experiences of reunification services during placement of their children in CYCC as well as a lack of practice guidelines for social workers rendering these services.*

The next section provides the study's rationale.

1.1.3. The study's rationale

Presently the researcher is working as a social worker at the DSD, where she has been employed for the past 13 years. In the execution of her duties and responsibilities, the researcher has observed that most of the children who have been taken away from the care of their parents and are put in CYCCs return back to centres shortly after being reunited with their parents and families. In some instances, the researcher observed that some of the children who abscond from CYCCs do not return to their parents, but rather seek an alternative place to stay.

The DSD's current Guidelines on reunification services for families (2012) are process guidelines that do not focus on parents' experiences of reunification services; instead, they focus on the steps of the reunification process, the elements of the reunification services provided to families by programmes and the benefits of reunification. The

researcher has also observed that most of the parents involved in reunification services have a negative attitude towards the services and sometimes towards the social workers assisting them. This often leads to unsuccessful reunification between parents and children. According to the DSD's 2022/23 Annual performance plan (2022a:143–144), Gauteng saw 4 752 children placed in CYCCs in Gauteng and 84 children in these CYCCs re-unified with their families.

Based on the above, the researcher is of the view that understanding parents' experiences of reunification services during the placement of their children in CYCCs will assist in providing practical guidelines on reunification services to social workers. Furthermore, the researcher believes that these guidelines will enable social workers to provide effective reunification services aimed at enhancing the relationship between parents and children placed in CYCCs.

The theoretical framework of the research study will be discussed in the following section.

1.1.4. Theoretical framework

In research, a theory can be used as a guide for what the researcher hopes to discover in the research study (Creswell 2016:46). In conjunction with a theoretical framework, the researcher better understands the subject under study. The researcher decided to concentrate on the strength-based perspective and ecosystems theory because they were found to be related to this study, as they deal with the frameworks for understanding aspect of social life and analysing the interrelationship between individual and common difficulties (Rubin & Babbie 2014:596).

1.1.4.1. Strengths-based perspective

The premise of the strengths-based viewpoint is that, although people may experience negative situations in their lives, they possess the strength to conquer any situation with which they might be confronted. The social worker's responsibility in this situation is to help such individuals to discover and explore their strong points and available resources to help them realise their objectives and their visions or dreams (Jones- Smith 2014:3).

This view resonates with Saleebey's (2009:48) suggestion that the strength-based approach is intended to assist people during challenging situations to find, sustain and protect the variety of inside and outside resources that are needed to live normally and self-reliantly in the community.

Ten key points for strengths-based counselling recommended by Smith (2006:38–48), which the researcher applied to the reunification process, are:

- 1. Creating the therapeutic alliance** (i.e. making or generating a healing agreement) – At this point, the social worker following the strengths-based perspective is expected to establish a good relationship with his/her clients by assisting them to identify and develop the strengths and competencies that would help them to combat any adverse situation they might have been confronted with. Thus, when providing reunification services, social workers must focus on the positive aspects (strengths), of both parents and children and further allow them an opportunity to develop skills that would enable them to live together in harmony once reunited.
- 2. Identifying strengths** – The social worker gives his/her clients an opportunity to share their difficulties from the strength-based perspective. During the reunification process, the social worker encourages parents and children to share their difficulties with the aim of facilitating them in developing the strengths that would enable them to deal with such difficulties.
- 3. Assessing presenting problems** (i.e. evaluating given difficulties) – The strengths-based evaluation focuses on the client's emotional and behavioural expertise and abilities, and on how these could add to sustaining relationships with family members, peers and grown-ups; improve their capability to cope with difficulties and tension, and encourage their personal, social and educational growth. At the present point, the social worker assesses the presenting difficulties and challenges faced by parents and children that may hinder the reunification process.
- 4. Encouraging and instilling hope** – During this stage, the social worker supports clients for coming to therapy, whether willingly or unwillingly, by highlighting their strong points. In doing so, the social worker acknowledges

and demonstrates his/her appreciation of parents and children for attending the reunification session.

5. **Framing solutions** – The social worker guides the discussions with or between clients towards finding solutions. Within the reunification process, the social worker leads the conversations with parents and between parents and children towards finding the solutions.
6. **Strengthening and competence** – The social worker accepts the fact that people need capability, which comes from the growth of strength over the course of a person's development and from strength-building across the developmental life span. Consequently, the social worker would assist parents and children to build their strengths and competences to deal with any obstacle that may come their way.
7. **Empowerment** – A critical awareness about the interrelations between empowerment and the socio-political life is promoted by the social worker. This is accomplished by educating parents and children about the realities of their lives.
8. **Changing** – The social worker perceives strength as the foundation for effective desired changes. The social worker becomes aware of the fact that, for change to occur in the lives of both parents and children, strength is required.
9. **Building resilience** – The social worker tries to assist clients to develop resilience that will protect them from experiencing the same issue again or to shield themselves from similar issues. Building resilience is crucial in ensuring that parents and children are able to prevent similar problems from happening.
10. **Evaluating and termination** – The social worker and the client will recognise the development made from the beginning to the end of the process. This is where they will find out whether the objectives were met by the client and if there can be changes made to the intervention. This can be achieved by recognising the client's strengths and resources.

The researcher finds the strengths-based perspective appropriate for this study as it concentrates on the strong points of the clients rather than the weak points and provides practical guidelines which could be used during the reunification process of parents and their children who have been put in CYCCs.

1.1.4.2. Ecosystems theory

The ecosystems theory, founded by Bronfenbrenner, focuses on understanding individuals within their environment (Neal & Neal 2013:722). Ecological systems are considered to exist at various levels, including micro, meso, exo, macro and chronolevel. According to the ecological systems theory, only through comprehending the micro - and macro systems of a person's environment can thoughts and behaviours be fully explained (Woodside, Caldwell & Spurr 2006:259).

Furthermore, Woodside et al (2006:260) state that “an ecological theory is more about comprehending the circumstances in which individuals exist, and integrating the connections between the individual, to clarify human development and the social structures of society”. In addition, the eco-systems theory is defined as “a combination of ecology and general systems theory because it is used to organize, integrate, and systematize data on how humans interact with one another and with their surroundings” (Nicholas, Rautenbach & Maistry 2010:170). Zastrow (2015:51), states that, the ecosystems theory describes people with common demands and concerns transitioning from one stage of life to the next. Although the individual inhabits the dominant place in the system, the ecosystems theory sees humans as a subsystem within a larger system, such as the family and the community (Nicholas et al 2010:170).

A basic principle of ecosystems theory states that if one portion of the system changes, the other portion of the system changes as well, affecting the overall operation of the system (Miley, O’Meila & DuBois 2013:95). Consequently, ecosystem-orientated social work practice centres on changes that occur in any of the systems, which ultimately result in changes in the entire system. In this case, a distinction is made between parents and children placed at the CYCCs and the environment they live in.

For that reason, the researcher believes that the ecosystems theory is pertinent to this study since it concentrates on the needs and maladaptive interpersonal issues that affect people as individuals, families and groups (Miley et al 2013:95). The theory can thus help social workers to better comprehend the maladaptive difficulties that parents of children who had been placed in CYCCs face, in relation to different systems.

1.2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

This section presents the study's research questions, goal and objectives.

1.2.1. Research questions

The goal of qualitative research questions is to focus the study's objectives on the specific issues that need to be investigated. These questions guide the method of enquiry (Creswell & Poth 2018:137). Research questions must be specific and answered with evidence (Rubin & Babbie 2014:159). Furthermore, Maxwell (2013:77) states that "often qualitative research does not provide the hypothesis at the start of the study; instead, it uses questions". This implies that research questions are key in a research study and are structured in such a manner that the findings offer an answer to them.

The study's main research questions were:

- What are parents' experiences of reunification services during placement of their children in CYCCs?
- How would parents whose children are placed in CYCCs like to be supported by social workers in terms of reunification services?

1.2.2. Research goals

Stringer (2014:98) refers to a research goal as an element that causes the researcher to discover and prove what is planned to be achieved by doing the research, while Vickers (2014:327) states that a research goal is a statement that defines the conclusions of the comprehensive inquiry. Maxwell's (2013:23) explanation is that a goal is everything that inspired you to do the study or that you have achieved by doing it. The research goal of this study would refer to the purpose for conducting the study and further explains what the researcher intended in this study.

The study's goals were as follows:

- To understand the experiences of parents whose children are placed in CYCCs regarding the reunification services offered by social workers in depth; and

- To suggest practice guidelines for social workers rendering reunification services to parents whose children are placed in CYCCs.

1.2.3. Research objectives

"Research objectives should be presented as a specific list" (Rubin & Babbie 2016:382). According to Braun and Clarke (2013:53), "compared to research goals, research objectives are more tangible and quantifiable elements". In other words, research objectives helped the researcher to achieve their goal and guided them throughout the research process.

To be successful in achieving the goal of the study's research, the researcher used the next research objectives:

- To explore and describe parents' experiences of reunification services during placement of their children in CYCCs;
- To explore and describe how parents whose children are placed in CYCCs like to be supported by social workers in terms of reunification services;
- To reach conclusions and make recommendations about these parents' experiences of reunification services and how they wish to be supported by social workers; and
- To develop practice guidelines for social workers rendering reunification services to parents whose children are placed in CYCCs.

While Chapter 2 will provide a more thorough examination of how the research methodology and procedures were implemented during the execution of the research, the following section briefly presents the research methodology planned for this study.

1.3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study of the techniques employed in research to produce new knowledge is known as research methodology (Blanche, Durrheim & Painter 2014:561). Therefore, research is a scientific study done according to a specific methodology (De Vos & Strydom 2011:42). Given this, the researcher holds that the research methodology forms the basis of the research study and describes the research approach and research design.

The researcher used a qualitative approach and an exploratory, descriptive, and contextual design in this study.

1.3.1. Research approach

In this study, the researcher used a qualitative approach. “The term ‘qualitative research approach’ is used to describe both methods for gathering or analyzing data as well as a broader paradigm or framework for research”. (Braun & Clarke 2013:4). In addition, Silverman (2013:6) states that, “qualitative research consists of many different endeavours, many of which are concerned with the ‘objective’ (i.e. scientific) study of realities, which in some sense are objective (e.g. how culture works; the logic of conversation)”. For that reason, qualitative research relies on words and employs meaning rather than quantified data, which is numerical and statistical based (Nieuwenhuis 2020:59). Qualitative approach helped the researcher to understand how the participants experienced reunification services and how they would like to be supported.

The researcher chose the qualitative approach based on the following characteristics of the qualitative approach, as highlighted by Creswell and Poth (2018:43–44):

- Researchers who use the qualitative approach are interested in how people understand their surroundings and their life experiences.
- In qualitative research, the natural environment in which participants experience the phenomenon under investigation becomes the key focus.
- Researchers who use qualitative research are involved in the process of gathering data.
- There are multiple methods employed in qualitative research for data collection, including gathering data through interviews, observation, and document examination. These data collection techniques can be used simultaneously.
- In qualitative research, the researcher physically travels to the field, site(s), or institution(s) to gather information from the participants or to watch, note, or record behaviour in its natural environment.
- Researchers undertaking qualitative research interpret what they hear, see

and understand.

- The qualitative research process is inductive because the researcher constructs abstractions, concepts, hypotheses, and theories from the participant's words or narratives.
- Qualitative researchers create a detailed or comprehensive picture of the problem or issue under investigation.

Characteristics of qualitative approach helped the researcher to understand the participants experiences of reunification services. The characteristics of the qualitative approach, which will be applied in more detail in Chapter 2, lent themselves to an in-depth understanding of parents' experiences of reunification services during placement of their children in CYCCs.

1.3.2. Research design

A research design is the overarching framework for a study and includes the articulation of all aspects of the research, such as the epistemological and theoretical perspectives and methodological approach and how they are interrelated (Jones, Torres & Arminio 2014:69). A research design is used to plan and collect data to answer the research question (Smith 2019:35) and provides the researcher with a comprehensive guide on how the research methods will fit together and how, when and where the collection data will be done.

The researcher used an exploratory, descriptive, and contextual design in the study. The researcher investigated and comprehended a relatively new subject through an exploratory design, as exploratory research design is used to establish patterns, ideas or hypotheses by gathering preliminary information rather than to test or confirm a theory that provided the researcher with a more profound understanding (Frodermann 2018:6).

An exploratory design was used for this study to examine the participants' experiences and meanings from their own point of view. "In contrast to accurately generalizing to a larger population, a descriptive design tends to be more concerned with giving a feeling of what it's like to walk in the shoes of the people being described - providing rich information about their environments, interactions, meanings, and everyday lives" (Babbie 2013:51). A descriptive design was selected to describe parents' experiences

of reunification services during placement of their children in CYCCs, and the social work assistance preferred from their own frame of reference. Creswell (2013:48) states that, “qualitative research is conducted with the aim of understanding the contexts or settings in which participants in a study address a problem or issue”. Furthermore, qualitative researchers prefer to undertake research in the people’s natural settings to explain how things actually happen in the real world, such as sensations, experiences and social circumstances (Blanche, Durrheim & Painter 2014:287). Therefore, the participants’ context is crucial in qualitative research and the researcher took into consideration the contexts of the CYCCs as well as the family homes when participants shared their realities.

1.4. RESEARCH METHOD

Creswell (2014:247) defines research method as involving the forms of data collection (including aspects such as the population and sampling), data analysis and data interpretation that researchers propose for their studies.

1.4.1. Population

The population refers to the entire mass of observation that the researcher wants to study (Pandey & Pandey 2015:40). The word ‘population’ can also be explained as the group that a researcher is interested in generalizing about (Rubin & Babbie 2013:372). This implies that the term ‘population’ refers to the entire group of subjects the researcher is interested in.

The study’s population comprised all parents whose children were placed at CYCCs in the Tshwane municipal district in South Africa’s Gauteng province. When the study was proposed, there were 14 non-governmental CYCCs that were funded by the government and three governmental CYCCs in the Tshwane municipal district. The researcher opted for the CYCCs in the Tshwane municipal district as she worked near them, and it would be easy for her to reach them. The researcher drew a sample from parents whose children were placed at these centres, as the study could not include the complete population. Due to costs time considerations, the researcher could not include all the CYCC’s.

1.4.2. Sampling and sampling methods

A sample is the small subject nominated from the entire population to represent components in research (Pride & Ferrell 2016:88). Neuman (2012:146), states that, a sample is "a deliberately selected small group of examples or units that closely resembles the features of interest in a larger collection of cases, known as the population".

The researcher used purposive sampling, a type of non-probability sampling, in the study. Non-probability sampling is a sampling technique that selects samples through non-random methods (Pandey & Pandey 2015:53) and in which some components of the population have no chance of being nominated (Neuman 2014:274). Purposive sampling entails selecting participants who are representative of the population rather than just those who are available and ready to participate (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter 2014:139). Purposive sampling is described by Pandey and Pandey (2015:53) as the selection of a group from the population on the basis of available information, using the researcher's judgement to identify the participants that are exactly relevant to the study and considering them as representing the entire population. The researcher sampled the participants in this study through the lists of CYCCs that were requested from the DSD's Tshwane district office.

When including the participants in the sample, the researcher used the following criteria:

- The participants must have children placed in a CYCC in the Tshwane municipal district of South Africa's Gauteng province.
- The participants must have received reunification services from social workers.
- The participants must be residing in the Tshwane municipal district of South Africa's Gauteng province.
- The participants must agree to participate in the study and be accessible to do so.

To determine the sample size, the researcher used the data saturation principle. Data saturation means that the researcher should stop collecting data when the categories (or

themes) are saturated and when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new insights or new properties (Creswell 2014:189).

The following section will cover data collection, including preparation for data collection, pilot testing, data analysis and verification of data techniques.

1.4.3. Data collection

The study's boundaries are established during data collection, which “includes collecting information by means of unstructured and semi-structured interviews and observation, documents, focus groups discussions and visual materials, and establishing the protocol for recording information” (Creswell 2009:178). According to Rose, McKinley and Baffoe-Djan (2019:2), data collection refers to the real methods used to gather data for analysis. In other words, data collection is a means used by the researcher to obtain information relevant to the study. During data collection, the interviews were recorded, and the participants consented to the recording of their interviews prior to the interview sessions. The interviews lasted between 45min to 1h45 minutes.

1.4.3.1. Preparation for data collection

The preparation for data collection begins when the researcher chooses the research topic and formulates the research problem and objectives, as these will eventually lead him/her to the specific field in which the investigation will be conducted (Strydom 2011:332). However, it is crucial for the researcher to seek permission from the gatekeepers before entering the site to gain access (Creswell 2014:188). Participant preparation for data collection happened when the researcher had been granted permission by the gatekeepers to enter the field.

In this study, the researcher requested permission from the DSD’s Tshwane district office to conduct the research and requested the list of all CYCCs around Tshwane (see Addendum A). Upon receiving the lists, the researcher selected CYCCs run by both non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and government and planned to contact them telephonically to seek an appointment and permission from the centre managers (see Addendum B). Thereafter, the researcher visited the managers of the CYCCs at their offices to build a rapport and request permission to conduct the research. Following this,

the researcher requested that social workers at the selected centres assist her by providing information from their caseloads on parents of children placed at their centres who meet the sampling criteria.

The researcher then contacted the parents, with the permission of the gatekeepers (Unisa ethical committee, the heads of institutions, the social work supervisor and social workers), and established whether they would like to be in contact with the researcher to conduct research. The researcher made arrangements and visited the parents' homes and the CYCC's during family days after gauging their interest to get to know them better and get their consent to be a part of the research.

The reason why the student approached the CYCC is because service points only serve a few cases per office. All the children from different offices are at the CYCC, so it was easy for the researcher to contact their parents via CYCC's. The gatekeepers (social work supervisor and the social worker) gave the student a list of parents and their contact numbers. As it was challenging for the student to get hold of them at first, so she went back to the social work supervisor who advised her to come on family days because parents come every Sunday to visit their children. The social work supervisor referred the student to the care worker as she does not work on Sunday, and the care worker introduced the student to the parents during family days.

The researcher notified the research participants regarding the reason for the research, she gave them the questions, and explained the information in the interview guide before the actual interview (see Addenda C and F). The participants were then given a letter to sign stating they consent to take part in the research study (see Addendum D) after a semi-structured interview was conducted in English. The researcher continued with the same method for contacting CYCCs until data saturation was reached.

1.4.3.2. *Methods of data collection*

In qualitative research, data is collected through in-depth research, in-depth questioning, and interviews that record direct quotations about people's own thoughts and experiences (Christensen, Johnson & Turner 2011:363). The researcher chose semi-structured interviews to collect information from participants for this study because it

allowed her to probe participants and gather more detailed information about their experiences.

Christensen et al (2011:56) define an interview as a situation where the interviewer asks the interviewee a series of questions, and Makofane and Shirindi (2018:40) define semi-structured interviews as flexible interviews that allow additional questioning to guide the discussion and allow participants to express their experiences. According to Nieuwenhuis (2020:61), "In exploratory and descriptive designs when there is minimal prior understanding about a study issue, semi structured interviews are helpful techniques". Open-ended questions that encouraged greater present-moment awareness would be used to conduct interviews with the study's participants (Corey, Corey & Corey 2014:39).

1.4.3.3. Pilot testing

The study made use of pilot testing as part of the research method. According to Rubin and Babbie (2016:237), a crucial step in the research process is a pilot study. It enables the researcher to assess if the data collected will yield the desired results. Piloting data collection tools entails putting them through a scaled-down version of a planned study that would be carried out to create or improve the data collecting tools (Grove, Burns & Gray 2013:703). Pilot testing is essential because its goal is to maximize reliability (Fink 2010:184). Those who participate or take part in pilot testing should not take part in the main inquiry (Strydom 2011:236).

For the reasons stated above, the researcher used a pilot test with two participants. She was able to establish if changes in the interview guide were necessary by interviewing the two participants using the interview guide.

1.4.4. Method of data analysis

Data analysis is a constant process relating to repeated reflection about data, asking questions and writing memos throughout the study (Rubin & Babbie 2016:280). Carey (2012:218) states that, at its most basic level, analysis will typically begin with transcribing interviews and reading and re-reading the transcripts to look for emerging trends, especially those that link to the research questions and objectives.

To analyse the data, the researcher followed the eight steps proposed by Tesch (cited in Creswell 2009:186) as follows:

- The researcher transcribed the interviews and wrote down the themes from the transcripts.
- The researcher chose any transcript and wrote down meanings in the margin of the transcript.
- After repeating these steps with more transcripts, the researcher wrote a list of themes and then grouped them together according to similarities. The key themes, distinctive themes, and leftover themes were then separated out.
- The researcher then abbreviated the themes as codes which were written alongside the appropriate portion of the text. The researcher observed if new themes emerged.
- The researcher placed relevant themes into categories to reduce the number of categories. Linking lines indicated relationships shared by categories.
- The researcher then arranged the codes in alphabetical order after deciding on an acronym for the codes.
- The researcher compiled the data for each category and conducted a preliminary analysis of the information.
- The researcher recorded if data was considered necessary. If not, the researcher began to present the study's findings.

1.4.5. Data verification

The researcher used Guba's classic model of trustworthiness, which identified the following four elements of trustworthiness: truth-value (credibility), applicability (transferability), consistency (dependability) and neutrality (confirmability) (Guba in Krefting 1991:215–221).

Truth-value questions the confidence of the researcher in the realism or truth of the findings based on the research design, participants, and background, and is established through the credibility strategy (Guba in Krefting 1991:215–221). For the study's purpose, the researcher used triangulation, member checking and reflexivity.

Triangulation is defined as “an assessment of how many data sources on the same issue

may complement one another to enhance the study's understanding" (Creswell & Poth 2018:53). Triangulation entails collecting material in as many different ways and from as many diverse sources as possible (Terre blanche et al 2014:287). In addition, Yin (2011:81) claims that triangulation is the process of attempting to find "at least three means of verifying or corroborating a certain event, description, or fact being reported by the research". The researcher achieved triangulation by gathering data from parents whose children were placed in different CYCCs and used triangulation by using people from governmental and non-governmental institutions.

To get feedback and comments from as many stakeholders as possible, member checking is the process of asking participants if the researcher's preliminary findings accurately reflect their understanding of and experiences with the programme (Stephen, Marylynn, Frances & Riemer 2012:340). Member checking, according to Creswell (2016:192), is the procedure through which the researcher provides participants' themes or whole stories back and asks them if their themes or stories accurately reflect what they said. During the transcription of the data for this study, the researcher used member checking to find gaps in the recorded interviews. The researcher used member checking to get clarity from participants while she was transcribing by making appointments with the participants. She visited them on Sundays during family days and by doing so she was able to clarify the gaps and to see if she understood them according to their frame of reference.

Reflexivity "includes reflection on a variety of topics, such as the connection between theory and data, the impact of the researcher on the data gathered, and the researcher's biases and assumptions" (Stephen et al 2012:99). The researcher used reflexivity to stay aware of her prior experiences, her assumptions and beliefs and how it can influence the research process.

Applicability is the degree to which the results can be applied (adapted) to different contexts and settings or with different groups. (Guba in Krefting 1991:215–221). Transferability requires that findings are meaningful to the reader (Jones, Torres & Arminio 2014:36). It refers to the degree to which findings could be generalised or applied to other settings (Hays & Singh 2012:2001). Although the purpose was not to generalise findings, the research used a dense description of the research method to enable other researchers to undertake similar research.

Consistency of data refers to whether the finding would be consistent if the enquiry were replicated with the same participants or in a similar context and is established through the strategy of dependability (Guba in Krefting 1991:215–221). Similarly, Hays and Singh (2012:201) state that dependability refers to the consistency of study results over time and across researchers. The researcher enhanced consistency/ dependability through a dense description of research methods, triangulation of sources (parents from different CYCCs) and the use of an independent coder. The researcher and the independent coder utilised the same method of data analysis.

Neutrality refers to the degree to which the findings are a function solely of the participants and the conditions of the research and not of other biases, motivations and perspectives (Guba in Krefting 1991:215–221). Neutrality is established through the strategy of confirmability and by means of the confirmability audit, triangulation and reflexivity (Guba in Krefting 1991:215–221). Confirmability requires the researcher to tie findings in with data and analysis (Jones et al 2014:37). The researcher applied neutrality/ confirmability by means of triangulation of sources and reflexivity.

The following section will look at the ethical considerations relevant for this study.

1.5. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The systematic study of or formalisation of principles addressing the distinction between good and bad conduct is what the word ‘ethics’ refers to (David & Sutton 2011:30). The essential purpose of research ethics is to protect the welfare of research participants (Terre Blanche et al 2014:61). Rubin and Babbie (2016:80) define ethics as typically associated with morality, with both areas dealing with matters of right and wrong. Furthermore, Hilton, Fawson, Sullivan and DeJong (2020:61) refer to ethics as “the guideline for professional and unprofessional conduct of adequate moral obligation”. Creswell and Poth (2018:53) state that researchers should consider how they will handle ethical issues, and that they need to plan how they will address such ethical issues during the study. Ultimately, ethics are good and acceptable values that govern the researcher during the research process. Therefore, research ethics served as guiding principles throughout the research process.

Informed consent, confidentiality, information management, and participant debriefing would be observed by the researcher.

1.5.1. Informed consent

To participate in a research study, participants were adequately informed about the research, understand what is expected of them and have the freedom of choice to decide whether to participate (Arifin 2018:30; Sobočan, Bertotti & Strom-Gottfried 2019:809). Therefore, participants were fully informed about the research endeavours before they participated in the study or signed the agreement form.

In this study, the researcher obtained informed consent by conducting a participant information session where the study procedure, aims, ethical considerations, and expectations were covered. The purpose of conducting this information session were to seek consent from the participants (see Addenda A and C). The researcher avoided harm of participants as she conducted herself in a professional way, by informing the participants about the research endeavours and by seeking consent before they partake in the study, signing the agreement form and providing them with the right to withdraw from participating at any time.

1.5.2. Confidentiality and anonymity

Confidentiality and anonymity were used to protect participants' privacy. According to Hardwick and Worsley (2011:35), confidentiality ensures that information from participants is not revealed and anonymity ensures that real names are replaced by pseudonyms. "In research, participants need to be reassured that what they reveal will be treated as 'private' (confidentiality) and that they won't be identified through the research (anonymity)" (Boynton 2017:148). When designing and conducting research, unless participants have consented to their disclosure, researchers must take precautions to guarantee the confidentiality of research data and sources (Greener 2011:146).

The researcher used pseudonyms rather than the participants' real names and other identifying traits, refrained from using the names of specific locations or offices, and avoided using real names altogether. For that reason, participants' identifying particulars were not used for this research (see Addendum E).

1.5.3. Management of information

Once information has been analysed, it needs to be kept for a reasonable period of time (Creswell 2014:100). Researchers should employ new methods of data management in qualitative research by developing back-up copies of computer files that protect the anonymity of participants, by masking their names in the data and, if a list is needed, by storing it separately (Creswell & Poth 2018:175). Improper management of information leads to a breach of ethical considerations (see Addenda A, C, D and E).

The researcher intended to keep all records, namely written notes and voice recordings, obtained for the purposes of this study, safely locked away on the computer with a password. Only the researcher, an independent coder, and the study supervisor had access to the information.

1.5.4. Debriefing of participants

During the course of a study, research participants can be psychologically harmed, and the researcher must be aware of and protect against such risks (Rubin & Babbie 2016:84). The researcher should strive to plan for the impact of data shared both before and after an interview in case any hurtful or intimate information is shared while collecting data. (Creswell 2014:98). At this stage, the researcher should correct any misunderstandings that might have surfaced in research participants' minds following the study's completion.

The researcher had the required arrangements for the participants' debriefing sessions should it be deemed necessary to refer them for counselling sessions (see Addendum H). A written commitment from a relevant service provider was obtained to provide debriefing, should it be necessary.

The following section clarifies key concepts for the study.

1.6. CLARIFICATION OF KEY CONCEPTS

1.6.1. Child

According to the Paperback Oxford English Dictionary (2012:118), a child is "a young human being below the age of full physical development", while Smith (2010:12) states

that “children comprise the population of young people (for present purposes, all those under the age of 18) who live through this phase of human existence, experiences and social contexts”. In the South African context, the National child care and protection policy (DSD 2019:14) and Section 1 of the Children's Act defines the term "child" as any person under the age of 18. As a result, for the purposes of this study, a child is defined as anyone under the age of 18.

1.6.2. Child and youth care centres (CYCCs)

A CYCC is defined in Section 191 of the Children's Act as "a facility for the provision of residential care to more than six children outside the child's family environment with a residential care programme suited for the children in the facility. The National child care and protection policy refers to CYCC as “a facility for the provision of court- ordered residential care to more than six children outside the child’s family environment in accordance with a residential programme suited for the children in the facility” (DSD 2019:14). According to Nina and Dellen (2010:469), a CYCC is “a temporary form of alternative care”. The DSD Children’s Act Practice Note (DSD 2010c:6–11) suggests that:

“CYCCs include a children’s home, shelter, place of safety, secure care and the school of industry, and exclude a partial care facility, a boarding school, a school hostel or other residential facility attached to a school, a prison, or any other establishment.

which is maintained mainly for tuition or training of children other than an establishment which is maintained for children ordered by court to receive tuition or training.”

For the purpose of this study, CYCCs means a registered facility that is used as residential care for children who need care and support and which has suitable programmes for such children.

1.6.3. Experience

The Paperback Oxford English Dictionary (2012:249) defines ‘experience’ as undergoing or being affected by a situation. It refers to the totality of a person’s perceptions, feelings and memories (Collins English Dictionary 2010). Within the context of this study, ‘experience’ means personally undergoing a certain situation.

1.6.4. Family reunification

According to the Guidelines on reunification services for children (DSD 2012:5), “family reunification refers to the physically reunion of children who are in alternative care placement with their parents/ families”. Similarly, the Evaluation of family reunification services (DSD 2015:6–7) refers to the “services that are provided for purposes of returning children who have been placed in out-of-home care to their families of origin”. Family reunification is seen as the primary goal for the majority of children who have been placed outside of their families (DSD 2015:6–7). The Revised white paper on families in South Africa (DSD 2021:13) refers to reunification as “reunification of family members who have been separated for extended periods of time for various reasons”. For the purpose of this study, ‘family reunion’ would mean the reunification of children placed at the CYCCs with their parents or families.

1.6.5. Reunification services

The Manual on family preservation services (DSD 1999:73) describes, reunification services as “services delivered after the finalisation of the statutory process and placement of the family member in alternative care”. The White paper on families in South Africa (DSD 2013:13) refers to reunification services as “family preservation services delivered to the family of origin to assist the family in the transitional period after the removal of the child in order for the family to stabilise and enter into reunification process after a period of separation”. Furthermore, the Guidelines on reunification services for families (DSD 2012:5) refers to family reunification services as “the facilitation of reintegration into families and community life after separation”. In this study, reunification services would imply empowering families to care for and protect their family members by implementing a reunion care plan and a permanency plan.

1.6.6. Social work

A group of people who share a set of principles, competencies, methods, knowledge, and beliefs to address a particular social need are said to be practicing social work (Dulmus & Sowers 2012:45). According to Section 1 of the Children's Act, a social worker is “a person who is registered or considered to be registered as a social worker in terms of the Social Service Professions Act 110 of 1978 as modified”. “Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic subject that fosters social change and development,

social cohesiveness, and the empowerment and emancipation of people” (Beckett and Horner 2016:8). Similarly, the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW 2014) defines social work as “a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people”. In this study, social work refers to the profession of assisting individuals, families, groups and communities in improving their individual and collective wellbeing.

1.6.7. Parent

Parents refer to “those individuals who are raising their own biological children as well as those who are raising foster children, adopted children, or children of other family members or friends” (Gordon & Browne 2013:205). In terms of Section 1 of the Children’s Act, “parent in relation to a child, includes the adoptive parent of a child”. Lastly, the Paperback Oxford English Dictionary (2012:521) defines a parent as “a father or a mother”. In this study, a parent means a person responsible for and capable of raising a child, including biological parents.

1.6.8. Practice guidelines

"Practice standards encompass a mix of skills, techniques, and activities consistent with a holistic social work focus on persons and their situations" (Arora 2013:2). Gutierrez, Parsons and Cox (1998:241) state that "social work practice standards offer a framework for considering and executing social work practice in order to achieve essential social change in ways that meet human needs". Practice guidelines, in this study refer to a collection of guiding principles for social workers.

The next section lays out the research report study’s format and structure.

1.7. STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

This research report is divided into the following chapters:

Chapter 1: General introduction and orientation to the study

The introduction, the study’s problem statement, theoretical framework, research

questions, research goals and objectives, research methodology and methods, ethical considerations, and key concept clarification are all covered in this chapter.

Chapter 2: Implementation of the research methodology

This chapter focuses on the research approach and application of the study's research design, the population and sampling, preparing participants for collection of data, data collection methods, the pilot testing, analysis of data methods used, and verification of data, as well as the ethical considerations implemented.

Chapter 3: Research findings and literature control

The qualitative study's research findings are presented in this chapter as well as a critical discussion of the results.

Chapter 4: Conclusions, recommendations and practice guidelines

The researcher explains the research's findings in this chapter and offers recommendations based on them.

1.8. CHAPTER SUMMARY

The background information, problem formulation, study motivation, and theoretical framework were all covered in the first chapter. Along with the research methodology and methodologies employed, it also covered the research questions, goals, and objectives that served as the study's compass. The framework of the research report was explained, ethical issues were covered, and crucial topics were clarified.

The researcher goes into more depth regarding her use of the research methodology in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a thorough explanation of the methodology used in the qualitative study to comprehend parents' experiences of reunification services during the placement of their children in CYCCs in the Tshwane municipal district of South Africa's Gauteng province. It focuses on the research approach; implementation of the research design, the population and sampling, preparation of participants for collection of data, methods of data collection, pilot testing methods of data analysis used and the verification of data applied, as well as ethical considerations implemented.

According to Mohajan (2018:4), "research methodology indicates the logic of development of the process used to generate theory that is the procedural framework within which the research is conducted". Therefore, detailed knowledge of research methodology is necessary to conduct meaningful research (Kumar 2015:21). "Methodology specifies how researchers may go about practically studying whatever they believe can be known" (Terre Blanche et al 2014:6). The key questions to consider when selecting a research methodology are what types of methods are best suited for the goals of the research project, and which methodologies is the researcher most equipped to use or most attracted to (Tracy 2013:25). This implies that research methodology is a process that the researcher intends to follow in the execution of his/her research project.

Given this, the researcher believes that research methodology is the foundation of the research study because it describes the research approach and research design chosen. The researcher used the qualitative research approach and the exploratory, descriptive and contextual design, as discussed in the following section, to investigate parents' experiences of reunification services during their children's placement in CYCC in the Tshwane region.

2.2. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESEARCH APPROACH

According to Creswell (2014:3), the researcher can use qualitative research, quantitative research and/or mixed methods of research. Quantitative research focuses on establishing a connection between facts and measures of validity, generalisability, and reliability, supported by recognised statistical tests, (Fawcett & Pocket 2015:72), whereas qualitative research is “an activity that locates the observer in the world by using a set of interpretive material practices that make the world visible” (Creswell & Poth 2018:7). Moreover, Leavy (2022:09) states that researchers use this approach to understand social phenomenon and the meaning people ascribe to them, and Rallis and Rossman (2012:8) state that qualitative research is grounded in the natural world; uses numerous approaches; “focuses on context; is emergent rather than strictly prefigured; and is fundamentally interpretive when it is used”. In comparison, mixed methods entail the researcher using both “qualitative and quantitative methods in a single study for the purpose of obtaining a fuller picture and deeper understanding” (Fawcett & Pocket 2015:81).

The researcher used the qualitative approach for this study because the evidence-based practice is applicable to fields such as social work (Flick 2018:10). The qualitative research approach assisted in exploring and describing parents’ experiences of reunification services during placement of their children in CYCCs. The findings included relevant and sufficient information about parents’ experiences of reunification services during placement of their children in CYCCs as well as the support and assistance they preferred from social workers. The researcher chose qualitative research to gain a comprehensive first-hand comprehension of parents’ experiences and needs in the context of reunification with their children in CYCCs. She also decided to interpret the obtained narratives using the strength-based approach and the ecosystems theory. The research goals and objectives for the purpose of this research project were met through qualitative research.

The researcher referred to the qualitative approach's characteristics (Creswell 2014:185) in Chapter 1 and used them as follows during her study:

- *Researchers who use the qualitative approach focus on how people understand the world around them.* In this study, the researcher was able to discover and explain parents' own experiences of reunification services during placement of their children in CYCCs through information gained during face-to-face interviews.
- *In qualitative research, the natural setting of participants is the key focus.* In this instance, the CYCC setting where the child is placed and the family's home setting where the child is expected to live after being reunited with the family, became the key focus.
- *Researchers who use qualitative research are part of the process of data collection.* The researcher was involved throughout the process of data collection as she conducted all the interviews.
- *Various methods are employed in qualitative research for data collection, including interviews, observation and studying documents to obtain data.* The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews aided by an interview guide for the data collection process in this study.
- *In qualitative research, the researcher goes to the field, to collect data in its natural setting.* The researcher went to the participants during the visits at the CYCCs to collect data in this study.
- *Researchers undertaking qualitative research interpret what they observe.* The researcher interpreted data collected from the participants using Tesch's eight steps (cited in Creswell 2014:198).
- *The qualitative research process is inductive because the researcher constructs concepts, hypotheses, and theories based on the words or narratives of the participants.* From the data collection process, the researcher gathered information necessary for her research and interpreted the findings based on literature control.
- *Qualitative researchers develop a holistic picture of the problem or issue under study.* In this study, the researcher developed a holistic understanding regarding parents' experiences of reunification services during placement of their children in CYCCs and the social work support preferred.

The next section examines how the research design was put into action.

2.3. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design is the plan for conducting the study (Creswell & Poth 2018:49) and provides specific guidelines for research procedures (Creswell 2014:12). The research design process can be broken down into smaller units to understand the parameters of a research project. These smaller units include data collection methods and data analysis (Guest, Namey & Mitchell 2013:2). A research design is a strategic framework for action that serves as a bridge between research questions and the execution or implementation of the research (Terre Blanche et al 2014:34). Without a proper research design, or plan, it would have been difficult for the researcher to execute her research study.

The researcher used an exploratory, descriptive, and contextual design for the study, as described in Chapter 1. Exploratory research is frequently carried out in new areas of inquiry with the following objectives: (1) to determine the scope of a specific phenomenon or problem, (2) to produce some preliminary hypotheses (or "hunches") about that phenomenon, or (3) to determine whether it is feasible to carry out a more in-depth investigation into that phenomenon (Bhattacharjee 2012:5). Furthermore, the researcher conducts exploratory research when the subject of the study is relatively new and unstudied, or when a researcher seeks to test the feasibility of undertaking a more detailed study or wants to refine the methods to be used in a more detailed study (Rubin & Babbie 2016:60). The goal of exploratory research is not only used to gather necessary evidence or data, but also to gain awareness and comprehension of the research topic (Wiid & Diggens 2013:56). In addition, Leavy (2022:5) states that exploratory research can aid us fill a gap in information about a new or under-researched topic, or to approach the topic from a different perspective. Although information exists on the reunification procedure of parents and children, there was a gap regarding knowledge of how parents experienced the reunification services received from social workers, as well as in practice guidelines for social workers in this regard.

As far as the descriptive design is concerned, the focus was on conveying a sense of what it is like to walk in the shoes of the people being described, their environments, interactions and daily experiences (Babbie 2013:51). The descriptive design was used to describe parents' experiences of reunification services during placement of their children in CYCCs from their narratives, as well as to analyse and describe the answers

or findings in accordance with themes, linked to the study's literature control.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018:44), the researcher should seek out an understanding of contextual features (e.g., social, political and historical) and their influence on participants' experiences to report on the setting in which the problem is being studied. "Qualitative research is conducted with the aim of understanding the contexts or settings in which participants in a study address a problem or issue" (Creswell 2013:48). The researcher took the context of the CYCC and circumstances at home into account when formulating the interview guide questions and utilising the theoretical frameworks in interpreting data.

The researcher will give an account of how she implemented the research method.

2.4. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESEARCH METHOD

"The research method involves the forms of data collection, analysis and interpretation that researchers propose for their studies" (Creswell 2014:247). According to Rubin and Babbie (2016:46), "qualitative research methods are more flexible than quantitative methods as they allow research procedures to develop along with the process". The qualitative research method also allows the researcher to study specific subjects in depth, while identifying the categories of information that emerge from the data (Terre Blanche et al 2014:47).

In this section, the following aspects will be discussed: population, sampling and sampling methods.

2.4.1. Population

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the population refers to the entire mass of observation that the researcher wants to study (Pandey & Pandey 2015:40). Furthermore, Terre Blanche et al (2014:562) state that "population is the greater pool of cases from which a sample is drawn". The group that a researcher is interested in making generalisation about is another way to define the word "population. (Rubin & Babbie 2013:372). Moreover, Bhattacharjee (2012:65) defines population as all the people or things that have the

characteristics that the researcher is interested in studying.

The population for this study comprised all parents whose children were placed at CYCCs in the Tshwane municipal district in South Africa's Gauteng province. At the time that the research was undertaken, there were 26 non-governmental CYCCs that were funded by the government and two governmental CYCCs in the Tshwane municipal district. The third governmental CYCC in the Tshwane municipal district was temporarily closed for renovations. The researcher purposively selected two CYCCs (one governmental CYCC and one non-governmental CYCC) in the Tshwane municipal district as she worked closely with them. The researcher drew a sample from parents whose children were placed at these centres, because the study was unable to encompass the entire population for the reason of insufficient time and cost restraints.

2.4.2. Sampling and sampling methods

A sample is a selected small collection of cases or units that closely reproduces features of interest in a larger collection of cases, called the population (Neuman 2012:146). Neuman (2012:146) further defines a sample as a small group of cases chosen by a researcher from a large pool and generalised to the population. The process of selecting a smaller group that studies observe, or the sample, is referred to as sampling (Rubin & Babbie 2014:380). Sampling involves selecting specific research participants from the entire population and is conducted in different ways according to the type of study (Terre Blanche et al 2014:564).

For the study, the researcher used non-probability sampling, which is a sampling technique that selects samples through non-random methods (Pandey & Pandey 2015:53) and in which there is no chance of selecting certain segments of the population (Bhattacharjee 2012:69). Specifically, the researcher chose to use a form of non-probability sampling known as purposive sampling, a method that allows the researcher to select a sample "based on [their] own judgment about which units are most representative or useful" (Rubin & Babbie 2016:222). According to Pandey and Pandey (2015:53), purposive sampling is the selection of a group from a population based on available information, with the intent of representing the entire population. Furthermore,

purposive sampling implies that cases representative of the population is chosen (Terre Blanche et al 2014:139). In purposive sampling, the researcher selects a sample of her planned research from the entire population using her own judgement. The researcher simply sampled the participants through the lists of CYCCs that were requested from the DSD's Tshwane district office (one list of centres run by NGOs and the other of governmental centres). From the lists provided, the researcher selected one governmental CYCC and one non-governmental CYCC that were close to her area as it would be easier for her to travel. The researcher contacted the CYCCs with the aim of seeking permission from the gatekeepers (the head of institution, social supervisor, and social workers) and recruiting participants.

As set out in her proposal, the researcher used the following criteria to purposefully choose participants:

- The participants had children placed in a CYCC in the Tshwane municipal district of South Africa's Gauteng province.
- The participants had received reunification services from social workers.
- The participants resided in the Tshwane municipal district of South Africa's Gauteng province.
- The participants were willing and available to take part in the study.

Parents who did not comply with these criteria were excluded from the sample.

The researcher followed to the principle of data saturation in this study, as soon as the collected data from the participants became repetitive, the sample size was determined. According to Creswell (2014:189), saturation means that the researchers should stop collecting data when the categories (or themes) are saturated; when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new insights or new properties. Fusch and Ness (2015:1408) state that failure to reach data saturation has an impact on the quality of the research conducted and hampers content validity. The researcher interviewed 15 participants when she reached data saturation, meaning that the participants were giving repetitive information.

The implementation of data collection, including preparation for data collection, methods of data collection and pilot testing, are presented in the next section.

2.5. IMPLEMENTATION OF DATA COLLECTION

Data is the basic material that researchers work on to draw valid conclusions from during research (Terre Blanche et al 2014:51). According to Creswell and Poth (2018:147) data collection is to focus on the actual types of data and the procedures for gathering them. Collecting data in qualitative studies involves prolonged observation or interviewing at the site, and researchers must be cognisant of their impact on the environment and minimise their disruption of the physical setting (Creswell 2014:97). In other words, data collection is a means used by the researcher to obtain information relevant to the study.

2.5.1. Preparation for data collection

The preparation for data collection means giving a detailed account of how the data will be collected (interviews, observations, tests, questionnaires) (Terre Blanche et al 2014:85). However, it is essential to obtain necessary permissions. Prior to the study, researchers need to obtain approval of individuals in authority (gatekeepers) (Creswell 2014:96). The permissions and building of rapport will differ depending on the type of qualitative approach being used and the participants sought (Creswell & Poth 2018:155–156).

As outlined in Chapter 1, the researcher requested permission from the DSD (Tshwane district office) to conduct the research and requested the lists of all CYCCs around Tshwane (see Addendum A). Upon receiving the lists, the researcher selected one non-governmental CYCC and one governmental CYCC, and contacted them telephonically with the aim of seeking an appointment and the go-ahead to carry out the study from the centre managers (see Addendum B). The selected CYCC's were easily accessible to the researcher and the other non-governmental CYCC's were non-compliant by the time the student was doing her research. Thereafter, the researcher visited the two CYCCs to build a rapport with the managers and asked the go-ahead to carry out the study and to refer social workers at the centres who could assist with information for the study. The researcher used the information these social workers provided from their caseloads of parents of children placed at their centres who met the sampling criteria to identify potential participants. The researcher contacted the parents, with the permission of the

social workers, and determined whether they were willing to meet with the researcher for research purposes. The researcher then made an appointment and conducted home visits to parents who agreed. This was done with the aim of seeking permission to conduct the study and to build relationships.

The participants were notified by the researcher of the reason for the research study and gave them the information and questions she planned to ask them before the actual interview took place (see Addenda C and F). The participants were given a consent letter to confirm their interest in taking part in the research study and the content of the letter was explained to them to ensure they understood (see Addendum D). The researcher originally planned to do the interviews in English, but some participants felt more comfortable expressing themselves in their vernacular languages. The challenge was solved by conducting the semi-structured interviews in English, Zulu or Tswana, depending on which of the three languages the participants felt most comfortable in. The researcher continued with the same method interviewing parents until data saturation was reached. The researcher then translated the Zulu and Tswana transcripts into English.

2.6. METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

A qualitative observation is made “when the researcher takes field notes on the behaviour and activities of individuals at the research site and records these in an unstructured or semi-structured way (using prior questions to which the inquirer wants to know the answers” (Creswell 2014:190). Furthermore, Lopez and Whitehead (2013:128) stipulate that for direct data, these methods may include interviews, observation, open-ended questionnaires, journaling (diary accounts) or ‘think aloud’ sessions. It is a method used by the researcher to collect information from participants. According to Creswell and Poth (2018:43) qualitative researchers often collect data in the field at the site where participants experience the issue or problem under study. These face-to-face interactions may occur over time and open-ended questions may be used by the researcher (Creswell and Poth 2018:43).

Semi-structured interviews were used by the researcher for this study. According to Lopez and Whitehead (2013:128), interviews are widely regarded as the most effective method for gathering qualitative data. In qualitative research, interviews can be

unstructured, semi-structured or, on occasion, structured. A list of questions is provided by an interview guide to ensure that the research questions or objectives are addressed (Lopez & Whitehead 2013:128). The interviews with the participants for this study were conducted using open-ended questions, which draw the participant's attention to the present moment (Corey, Corey & Corey 2014:39). According to Creswell (2016:131), open-ended questions "use specific wording such as "tell me more", "I need more details", "what is an example of that", and "could you explain your response more" or "what does that mean". As a result, open-ended questions do not restrict participants' ability to provide an answer/response. The interviews lasted between 45min to 1h45 min. The interviews were recorded with the researcher's cell phone and a laptop and the consent were obtained in writing.

As planned in the proposal, the researcher asked the following biographical questions:

- What is your marital status?
- How old are you?
- What is your economic status?
- How long has your child been placed at the CYCC?
- How often do you visit your child at the centre and why?
- How often does your child come back home and why?

The following open-ended questions were also posed by the researcher:

- Describe the reunification services you have received from social workers in the field and at the CYCC.
- What is your experience of reunification services between you and your child who is placed in the CYCC?
- What are your needs regarding reunification services?
- What suggestions can you make regarding the reunification services provided by social workers?

Based on the pilot test from the interview guide questions, the researcher prepared statements of clarification should she need to use them. For example, she prepared a statement explaining what reunification services are and asking about what is working

well and what can be done differently regarding reunification services.

The motive for these questions was to learn more about the experiences of the participants and to better understand those experiences.

The researcher used the following interviewing skills (amongst others) during data collection:

- **Listening**

Listening is defined as a process entailing hearing, attending to, understanding, evaluating and responding to spoken messages (Bozorgian 2012:658). Active listening requires the researcher to have good listening and observation skills that focus on the participants' narratives as well as non-verbal communication (Dejonckheere & Vaughn 2019:6). The researcher demonstrated active listening to the participants using eye contact, gestures and facial expressions. To comprehend the participants' perceptions and realities in the world, the researcher listened carefully to what participants shared. The researcher listened to and observed the participants and took notes of the main points, then wrote a full report to recall the interview content throughout the interviews.

- **Attending**

Research participants are voluntarily giving their time and they deserve to have the researcher's full attention and consideration. According to William, Robert and Miller (2013:252), "telling participants that the researcher is keen and strong enough to listen to their secrets encourages them to talk freely". Another way of showing that the researcher is attending to the participants is through non-verbal clues that indicate the openness to learn from them (William et al 2013:251). The researcher attended to participants throughout the interview by showing interest (concentrating on them, listening to what they were saying through non-verbal cues) and giving encouraging comments and nods, which indicated the researcher's openness to learn from them. The participants felt that the researcher was keen to listen to their experiences and they were encouraged to talk freely.

- **Questioning**

"Asking people questions about their lives, opinions and experiences, and allowing them to tell their stories freely, is a powerful method of understanding

people's lives" (Ellis & Berger cited in Carspecken & Carspecken 2013:149). According to William et al (2013:252), skills needed for interviews may depend on the type of questions asked. Again, Creswell (2016:131) states that the researcher should ask open-ended questions, usually starting with 'what' or 'how'. Without questioning, it would be impossible for the research interview to take place and, ultimately, the researcher would be unable to gather the required data. The researcher used questioning and participants were able to express themselves by telling their stories. This enabled the researcher to understand people's life-worlds as she gathered the required data.

- **Establishing rapport**

Another skill needed is to be able to establish rapport quickly to encourage participants to talk (William et al 2013:251). According to Bronstein et al (2012:1091), building rapport is essential for a close connection in which there is mutual understanding. A researcher has to establish rapport with the participants so that they will disclose detailed perspectives about the aspect under research (Creswell & Poth 2018:156). With biographical inquiries at the start of the interview, the researcher helped the participants relax and build a relationship with them, which helped them feel comfortable talking about their experiences.

2.6.1. Pilot testing

A pilot test is often performed to test the feasibility of techniques, methods, questionnaires and interviews, and how they function together in a particular context (Fraser, Fahlman, Arscott & Guillot 2018:263). Pilot testing was used in the study. To develop or improve data gathering methods, they must be put through a scaled-down version of a proposed study (Grove, Burns & Gray, 2013:703). Those who participate or take part in pilot testing should not take part in the main inquiry (Strydom 2011:236).

Pilot testing enabled the researcher to establish if there were changes required in the data collection instrument and whether the process would run smoothly using the same instrument.

Two people were used to test the interview guide. The pilot testing for the government CYCC was done on a Sunday during family day. For the non-government CYCC she

visited the participant at home on a Sunday. The researcher interviewed them using the interview schedule. The results of the pilot testing were not included in the main study. For the reasons stated above, the researcher used the results of the pilot testing to determine changes to the interview guide that were required. Changes to the interview guide are discussed in the section on data collection methods.

2.7. METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS USED

According to Creswell and Poth (2018:181), “data analysis involves organising the data, conducting a preliminary read-through of the database, coding and organizing themes, representing the data and forming an interpretation of them”. During this process, data is broken down into themes and interpreted in new ways (Terre Blanche et al 2014:322). Furthermore, Carey (2012:218) states that data analysis includes transcribing interviews looking for emerging trends, especially those related to the research question.

The following eight steps were used to analyse the data during this study, as proposed by Tesch (cited in Creswell 2014:198):

- The researcher studied every transcript, recorded the interview's transcript, and noted any themes that emerged.
- The researcher studied one recording at random, making notes in the margins about its underlying implications.
- The researcher created a list of the developing themes after repeating step two. Major themes, distinctive themes, and leftover topics were separated into three columns.
- The researcher next went over the data once again using the list of topics. Codes that summarised the concepts were written next to the corresponding passage of text.
- Themes were classified by the researcher. Interrelationships were demonstrated by drawing lines between the categories.
- The researcher alphabetised the codes after making a final choice about code abbreviation.
- Each category's data was written up.

- The researcher started outlining the study's findings.

2.8. METHODS OF DATA VERIFICATION USED

The traditional trustworthiness model developed by Guba was employed by the researcher to demonstrate the trustworthiness of this study's findings. Guba, who was mentioned in Chapter 1, (cited in Krefting 1991:215–221) suggests four components of data trustworthiness: truth-value (credibility), applicability (transferability), consistency (dependability) and neutrality (confirmability).

Truth-value is established using the credibility method and the following standards: extensive and diverse field work experience, timely sampling, reflexivity, triangulation, member checking, peer assessment, interviewing methodologies, the researcher's authority, and structural coherence (Guba in Krefting 1991:215–221). According to plan, the researcher used triangulation, member checking and reflexivity.

- **Triangulation**

According to Stephen, Marylynn, Frances, and Riemer (2012:99), triangulation refers to an examination of how different sources of data on the same topic may complement each other to deepen the understanding of the study. Triangulation involves using several measurement alternatives and seeing if they tend to produce the same findings (Rubin & Babbie 2016:154). In addition, Tonon (2015:195) indicates that, by triangulating information sources, the researcher compares information about the same phenomenon obtained in different moments of the field work, or as was the case with this research, compares the narrations from the various participants involved in the field. The researcher was able to triangulate the data collected from parents whose children are placed in different CYCCs in this study.

- **Member checking**

As stated in Chapter 1, member checking means that the researcher shares preliminary findings with the participants to obtain their comments and feedback (Stephen et al 2012:340). In other words, the participants are asked to say if these findings accurately reflect their understanding of and experiences. According to Creswell (2016:192; 2014:201), when the researcher inquired by

asking the participants if their life stories (themes) as transcribed are precise representations of what they articulated, this is known as member checking. To identify gaps in the transcribed interviews, member checking was performed by the researcher during the data translation and transcription for this study. The researcher transcribed all 15 interviews and translated 14 of the interviews on her own. She revisited the participants with the transcribed interviews to establish if the transcribed and translated interviews accurately reflected their experiences and understanding. The researcher used member checking when she was transcribing, and she got clarity from the participants on what they said during the interviews by doing follow-up questions. The researcher also made appointments with the participants and visited them on Sundays when they came for family days and at their homes. By doing so, she was able to ask them questions and to check if she understood them according to their frame of reference. This process assisted the researcher to clarify the gaps.

- **Reflexibility**

Reflexivity includes reflection on the relationship between theory and data, the researcher's impact on the data collected, the researcher's biases and assumptions, and the relationship between structure and agency (Stephen et al 2012:99). The researcher reflected on her own role as social worker within the DSD. The researcher had not had previous contact with the participants as she is not based at the CYCC.

According to Guba (cited in Krefting 1991:215–221) **applicability** refers to “the degree to which the findings can be applied to other contexts and settings or with other groups”. Applicability is established through the strategy of transferability and by means of nominated samples, comparison of samples to demographic data, time samples and a dense description (Guba in Krefting 1991:215–221). Transferability does not involve generalised claims but invites readers of research to make connections between elements of a study and their own experience or research (Nieuwenhuis 2016:124). Transferability requires that findings are meaningful to the reader (Jones, Torres & Arminio 2014:36). It is the degree to which findings could be generalised or applied to other settings (Hays & Singh 2012:2001). Although the purpose of the research was not to generalise findings, a dense description of the research method was used in Chapters 1 and 2 to enable other researchers to undertake similar research.

According to Guba (cited in Krefting 1991:215–221), **consistency** of data refers to “whether the findings would be consistent if the enquiry were replicated with the same participants or in a similar context”. Consistency is established through “the strategy of dependability and by means of a dependability audit, dense description of the research methods, stepwise replication, triangulation, peer examination and code- recode procedure” (Guba in Krefting 1991:215–221). Dependability presupposes that the inquiry procedures are clear and contain a timeline of the various steps in the research process (Jones et al 2014:37). Similarly, Hays and Singh (2012:201) state that dependability refers to the consistency of study results over time and across researchers. The researcher enhanced consistency/dependability through a dense description of research methods in Chapters 1 and 2, triangulation of sources (parents from different CYCCs in two different categories of CYCCs (non-governmental CYCCs and governmental CYCCs)) and the use of an independent coder.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, **neutrality** “refers to the degree to which the findings are a function solely of the participants and the conditions of the research and not of other biases, motivations and perspectives” (Guba in Krefting 1991:215–221). Neutrality is established through the strategy of confirmability and by means of a confirmability audit, triangulation and reflexivity (Guba in Krefting 1991:215–221). According to Noble and Smith (2015:2) neutrality (or confirmability) is achieved when truth value, consistency and applicability have been addressed. “Confirmability is based on the researcher’s relative neutrality and reasonable detachment from bias” (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña 2018:311). Confirmability refers to “the aspects of the collected data, as the data needs to support the findings of the study and may not be shaped by the researcher’s motivations” (Creswell & Creswell 2018:259–261). This relates to Hays and Singh’s (2012:201) suggestion that confirmability refers to the degree to which findings of study are genuine reflections of the participants investigated. The researcher applied neutrality/confirmability by means of triangulation of sources (parents from different CYCCs in two different categories of CYCCs (non- governmental CYCCs and governmental CYCCs)) as well as reflexivity (being aware of her own role as social worker).

The following section will look at the ethical considerations relevant for this study.

2.9. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS IMPLEMENTED

“The purpose of research ethics is to protect the welfare of research participants” (Terre Blanche et al 2014:61). According to Creswell (2014:92), researchers need to protect their research participants and promote the integrity of their research. A code of ethics should serve to protect vulnerable populations and respect dignity and privacy (Sobočan, Bertotti & Strom-Gottfried 2019:806).

The following ethical principles were observed by the researcher, namely informed consent, confidentiality, management of information and debriefing of participants.

2.9.1. Informed consent

“Researchers must commonly seek regulatory approval to protect participants from breaches of confidentiality or other harms” (Sobočan et al 2019:809). Whether to participate or decline consent should be an informed decision taken by participants who are adequately informed about the research, comprehend the information and have freedom of choice (Arifin 2018: 30). No individual capable of giving informed consent may be enrolled in a research study unless he/she freely agrees (Srivastava 2020:10). Therefore, prospective participants must be completely informed about the research endeavour beforehand they consent to the study or take part in it.

In this study, the researcher conducted an individual information giving session with the participants during which the study’s research processes, goals and objectives, ethical considerations and expectations were discussed. The researcher conducted home visits to have sessions with participants and arranged with those who stayed faraway to have sessions at the CYCC during their visits to their children as it was accessible to the researcher. The purpose of conducting this information session was to seek consent from the prospective participants (see Addenda A and C).

2.9.2. Confidentiality and anonymity

Confidentiality means the researcher can identify a person’s responses, but promises not to make the person’s identity known, while anonymity implies a given response cannot be traced back to a specific participant (Bhattacharjee 2012:138). Participants need to be

reassured that what they share with the researcher will be treated as “private” (confidentiality) and that they will not be identified through the research (anonymity) (Boynton 2017:148). Participants’ identities should be protected using aliases and pseudonyms (Creswell 2009:91). Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2011:71) argue that anonymity can be achieved by putting in place specific measures, such as eliminating any recognisable data of the participants from interviews transcripts or quotes used.

The researcher avoided using participants’ actual names and recognisable characteristics, avoided stating the names of places and/or offices in the report, and used pseudonyms. The participants’ identifying particulars were not used for this research (see Addendum E). The researcher was provided with an office for privacy during the interviews and when she visited them at home the interviews were conducted in a private room to ensure privacy.

2.9.3. Management of information

Data should be stored on encrypted devices and be password protected (Arifin 2018:31). Interview recordings should be stored in an inaccessible cabinet and in password-protected storage media by the both the researcher and the supervisor (Flick 2015:35). De Vos and Strydom (2011:90) declare that information management is linked to confidentiality, as it places a strong obligation on the social worker to protect the information that is confined to them.

In this study, the researcher ensured that all records, namely, written notes and voice recordings, were kept safely locked away. Access to information was restricted and only permissible to the researcher, the independent coder and the study supervisor. Information was treated as confidential and participants remained anonymous, as outlined in Addenda A, C, D and E.

2.9.4. Debriefing of participants

The risk of harm for participants is a major ethical issue in social research (Flick 2015:37), and Arifin (2018:32) argues that the act of a researcher’s listening may create unintended harm to the participants during the interview. One way in which the researcher can assist participants in minimising potential harm that may have occurred

despite all precautions taken to avoid such harm (Strydom, cited in De Vos and Strydom 2011:67) is through a debriefing session. Mullan et al (2013:946) define debriefing as a facilitated discussion of participant actions and thought processes to encourage reflection and assimilation of learning into practice. Holding such a session after an interview gives participants the chance to process their event and its effects. This is the stage at which the researcher corrects any misconceptions that participants may have following the completion of the study. The researcher made debriefing arrangements with the participants and prepared, if necessary, to refer them to counselling sessions (see Addendum H). A written commitment was obtained from a relevant service provider close to the participants to provide counselling, but it was determined that it was not necessary to refer any participants for this service.

2.10. CHAPTER SUMMARY

The second chapter looked at how the research methodology was used to achieve the study's goals and objectives. As the research sought to understand parents' experiences of reunification services during placement of their children in CYCCs in the Tshwane municipal district of South Africa's Gauteng province, a qualitative research approach and an exploratory, descriptive and contextual design were found to be most appropriate. The application of the research method, including population and sampling, as well as data collection, data analysis and trustworthiness methods, were discussed. Ethical principles that were taken into account were explained.

The following chapter covers presentation of the research findings.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND LITERATURE CONTROL

This chapter will present the qualitative study's research findings as well as a critical discussion of the study's findings.

3.1. INTRODUCTION

A qualitative research study was carried out to investigate and explain parents' experiences of reunification services during placement of their youngsters and children in CYCCs, furthermore as to how social workers can assist them. The findings presented in this chapter are based on 15 semi-structured interviews with parents whose children were placed in CYCCs in the Tshwane municipal district of South Africa's Gauteng province. To increase the study's credibility, the researcher and an unbiased coder independently analysed the study's qualitative data. The researcher, the independent coder, and the researcher's supervisor had a meeting to examine these seven themes, 22 sub-themes, and seven categories that came out of the analysis. The independent coder is an experienced social worker who has been involved in coding and data analysis for many years and she has often utilised by Unisa. Following a discussion of the findings, direct quotes from the conducted interviews are provided.

3.2. BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE OF THE PARTICIPANTS

This section presents the biographical profiles of the participants who are parents whose children are placed in CYCCs in the Tshwane municipal district of South Africa's Gauteng province (see Table 3.1). As mentioned above, there were 15 people interviewed.

The demographic information on the participants includes their ages, genders, population groupings, marital status, and socioeconomic status (partially shown in Table 3.1 below). Participants' identities were replaced with pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality and anonymity. Reference was also made to CYCC A and CCYC B instead of naming the specific institutions.

Table 3.1: Biographical profile of the participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Population group	Marital status	Economic status	CYCC
Agnes	42	Female	Black African	Single	Employed	CYCC A
Brenden	47	Male	Black African	Married	Employed	CYCC A
David	40	Male	Black African	Single	Unemployed	CYCC B
Ethel	23	Female	Black African	Single	Employed	CYCC B
Feziwe	28	Female	Black African	Single	Unemployed	CYCC B
Gugu	45	Female	Black African	Single	Volunteer	CYCC A
Hilda	31	Female	Black African	Single	Unemployed	CYCC A
Kobus	39	Male	Black African	Single	Employed	CYCC A
Linda	37	Female	Black African	Single	Piece jobs	CYCC A
Merry	43	Female	Black African	Single	Unemployed	CYCC B
Pinky	32	Female	Black African	Single	Unemployed	CYCC B
Rejoice	44	Female	Black African	Single	Unemployed	CYCC B
Sharon	22	Female	Black African	Single	Unemployed	CYCC B
Tiny	45	Female	White	Married	Unemployed	CYCC A
Yolanda	32	Female	Black African	Single	Unemployed	CYCC A

The section coming below includes a description of the participants' demographic data.

3.2.1. Age distribution and marital status of participants

The participants ranged in age from 22 to 47. Nine participants' ages ranged from 22 to 40, and six of them were between the ages of 43 and 47. Only two of the 15 participants who were questioned were married at the time.

Emerging adulthood is regarded as the volitional years since it provides the most chance for exploring one's identity in terms of love, employment, and worldviews. (Halfon, Forrest, Lerner & Faustman 2018:123). Furthermore, over the past few decades, the number of marriages has decreased in many countries around the world (such as the Netherlands, United Kingdom, United States, Mexico, and Japan, while divorce rates have increased (Christians 2022:4). This also seems to be the case in South Africa. Du

Plooy and De Beer (2018:161) refer to the Department of Justice's annual report, which shows a 28% rise in divorces between 2012 and 2013, despite a decrease in the number of newly registered marriages during this time. This tendency, reflected in the biographical information of the participants, implies that the parents who participated in the study were mostly single, either due to divorce or a decision to stay single, without the support of a marital partner to raise their child/ren.

3.2.2. Gender distribution of participants

There were 15 participants, 12 of whom were female, and three men participated. According to Phumudzo, Shirindi and Makofane (2021: 362), “unmarried mothers are more likely to lack support from their children’s fathers and the extended family system, especially when they do not have relatives in their neighborhood”. Furthermore, Mathibela and Skhosana (2019:91) refer to parenting patterns in South Africa and indicate that “there is a high percentage of children parented by single parents, mainly mothers”. Moreover, “an increasing number of children are brought up in female-headed families, which have become a major element within society, locally and globally” (Mabelane, Makofane & Kgadima, 2019:158). In accordance with the above, it can be anticipated that the single mothers involved in this study did not have support from the fathers or family members of their children.

3.2.3. Population distribution of participants

Black Africans constitute the majority of the population in all the municipalities in Gauteng (Katumba et al 2021:7). Furthermore, since the end of apartheid, the black middle class has drastically increased in number and a new politically connected elite has become established (Horn 2020:15). Hamann (2015:73–74) states that, the racial makeup of the South African city of Tshwane is similar to the national statistics at 79% Black African, 16% White, 2.5% Indian/Asian, and 2.5% Coloureds. The biographical detail of the participants in the study corresponds with the statistics referred to above, as 14 participants were Black Africans and one was White. The sample clearly did not include representation from all four of the racial groups in the Tshwane municipality.

3.2.4. Economic status of participants

Out of 15 participants, only four were fully employed, while one survived through piece jobs and one provided services in one of the organisations as a volunteer. In South Africa, unemployment, poverty and inequality are socioeconomic problems regarded as the “triple challenge” (Leburu-Masigo 2020:175). Furthermore, Pasara and Garidzirai (2020:1) state that, due to the persistent unemployment and stagnant economic growth, economic challenges in South Africa are notable. Hlatywayo, Marange and Chinyamurindi (2017:56) state that, globally, the creation of employment opportunities has been a challenge, and South Africa is experiencing this pressure firsthand. This situation also applies to the Tshwane municipality. The literature findings are in line with the economic status of the participants mentioned above.

3.3. IDENTIFYING DETAILS OF THE PARTICIPANTS AND CHILDREN

Information was also gathered on the number of children in the CYCC from each participating family, the relation between the parent and child/ren, the length of time the child/ren have been in the CYCCs and the main reason for their removal. This detail is summarised in Table 3.2 and then briefly discussed.

Table 3.2: Identifying details of participants and children

Partici- pant	Number of child/ren in CYCC	Relation between parent and child/ren	Length of child/ren’s stay in CYCC at time of interview
Agnes	1 daughter	Mother	4 months
Brendan	4 sons	Uncle	3 months
David	1 son	Father	4 years
Ethel	4 sons	Sister	4 months
Feziwe	1 son	Mother	13 years
Gugu	1 son	Mother	4 years
Hilda	1 son	Mother	1 month
Kobus	2 daughters and 1 son	Father	More than 1 year

Linda	2 children	Mother	5 years
Merry	2 sons and 1 daughter	Mother	11 months
Pinky	2 sons	Mother	3 months
Rejoice	2 sons and 2 daughters	Mother	9 months
Sharon	1 daughter	Mother	11 months
Tiny	1 daughter	Mother	3 months
Yolanda	1 daughter	Mother	3 months

3.3.1. Participants' number of children in CYCC and how they were related.

Participants had between one and four children who were placed in a CYCC. Eight of the participants had one child, one participant had two children, two participants had three children, and four participants had four children who had been placed in a CYCC. Out of the 15 participants, 13 were biological parents and two were guardians or caregivers – one was the uncle and the other the sister of the children.

According to the interpretation in Section 1 of the Children's Act, "a parent includes the adoptive parent of a child" whereas, "a caregiver refers to any person other than a parent or guardian who factually cares for a child". The aforementioned persons have some relationship or regular responsibility for the child. This generally includes parents, guardians, foster parents, relatives, or other caregivers responsible for the child's welfare (see Paragraph 1.6.7. of Chapter 1).

It is estimated that approximately 3.9 million children in South Africa do not live with their biological parents (Smith & Lidström 2020:7). According to Van Der Walt (2018:616), there are 345 registered CYCCs in South Africa that provide care for 21 000 children. The participants' children were removed from their care and put in a CYCC by a legal document (court order), pending the social workers' investigations.

3.3.2. Length of time participants' children stayed in CYCC at time of interview

The length of time participants' children had been staying in the CYCCs at the time of the interviews ranged from one month to 13 years. Seven of the children had been at the CYCC for less than six months; four between six and 12 months; three for two

years; and one for 13 years. The majority of the children had thus been staying at a CYCC for a year or less.

Mathebula (2021:18) indicates that “family reunification within a child welfare setting refers to the process whereby a child, who was previously removed from the care of the birth parents or guardians, is returned to their care while the family receives necessary services” Furthermore, the general regulations in terms of the Children’s Act (South Africa 2010:Section 6(b)) states that every child should be placed in temporary safe care for the shortest timepossible. Regarding reunification and reintegration in terms of section 9, the regulations further state that every child should have a care plan that aims to providelifelong relationships with their family or an appropriate alternative, and that reintegration into the family and community should occur within the shortest possible timeframe (South Africa 2010: Section 19).

The number of children entering care institutions urgently needs to be reduced, and the number leaving institutions increased; where institutional care is considered absolutely necessary, the length of stays should be as short as possible (Van Ijzendoorn et al 2020:1). Lopez and Del Valle (2015:457) state that there is an international consensus about the need to avoid prolonged stays in residential care and a preference for family-based interventions for those children who have been separated from their families.

3.4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS IN RELATION TO LITERATURE

Themes, sub-themes, and categories that appeared from the data analysis will be presented and contrasted with the body of existing literature in this part. The framework of these findings suggests that the researcher sought answers to the following biographical and open-ended questions:

- How long has your child been placed in a CYCC?
- What was the reason for your child’s removal from your care?
- How often do you visit your child at the centre and why?
- How often does your child come back home and why?

- Describe the reunification services you have received from social workers in the field and at the CYCC.
- What is your experience of reunification services between you and your child who is placed in the CYCC?
- What are your needs and expectations regarding reunification services?
- What suggestions can you make regarding the reunification services provided by social workers?

The overview presented in Table 3.3 encapsulates the findings that emerged from the interviews with the parents of children removed from their care and placed in a CYCC. The response to the first question was incorporated with the identifying details of participants in Table 3.2.

Table 3.3: Overview: themes, sub-themes and categories

Themes	Sub-themes	Categories
Participants' descriptions of how and why their child/ren had been removed from their care	Child/ren were allegedly abused or neglected Participants were unable to provide adequate care Child/ren manifested behavioural problems	
Participants' accounts of when and why they visit their child/ren in the CYCC	Frequency of participants' visits to child/ren	Participants had not visited child/ren Participants visited child/ren at least once a month Participants visited child/ren every week
	Participants' reasons for visiting child/ren	Participants needed and missed child/ren Participants loved child/ren

Themes	Sub-themes	Categories
Participants' accounts of the frequency of their child/ren's visits to their homes	Child/ren had not visited Child/ren visited during school holidays	
Participants' descriptions of their experiences of reunification services provided by the field social workers	Participants received no reunification services from field social workers	
	Participants reported negative experiences with field social workers	Participants felt they were treated unfairly or were pressurised Participants reported no communication with field social workers, whom they experienced as unhelpful
	Participants reported positive experiences with field social workers	
Participants' descriptions of their experiences of the reunification services provided by CYCC social workers	Participants they were thankful for the care that CYCC provided to their children Participants received no services from CYCC social workers Participants had minimal contact with CYCC social workers	

Themes	Sub-themes	Categories
	<p>Participants reported positive experiences with the CYCC social workers</p>	
<p>Participants' descriptions of their needs and expectations in terms of reunification services</p>	<p>Participants needed and expected clear and regular communication with social workers</p> <p>Participants needed and expected guidance and understanding from social workers</p> <p>Participants needed and expected practical assistance and information from social workers</p> <p>Participants needed and expected their child/ren to be placed back in their care</p>	
<p>Participants' recommendations regarding reunification services provided by social workers</p>	<p>Removal of child/ren should be the last resort</p> <p>Reunification process should be sped up</p> <p>Social workers should ensure that the CYCC is a safe place</p> <p>Social workers should provide training opportunities and work with parents</p>	

The following section of this discussion will provide each of the major themes, as well as any related sub-themes or categories (where appropriate) and will corroborate or support each one using direct quotes from the interview transcripts. The available body of knowledge will be compared with the identified themes and sub-themes, along with their supporting storylines from the transcripts.

THEME 1: PARTICIPANTS' DESCRIPTIONS OF HOW AND WHY THEIR CHILD/REN HAD BEEN REMOVED FROM THEIR CARE

This theme emerged from the participants-provided information to the researcher's inquiry as to why their child was removed from their care. Miley, O'Meila and DuBois (2013:95) stipulate that the ecosystems perspective describes the ways in which the environment affects people and the ways in which people affect their environment. The removal of their children had an impact on the participants. Furthermore, a strengths perspective focus offers another path to help us mitigate unwarranted or excessive worry, anxiety and demoralisation. Exploring and using our strengths can enhance our immunity to stressors by building protective and pragmatic habits and actions (Rashid & McGrath 2020:4). The participants showed strength to cope after the removal of their children. This means that both the ecosystems and the strengths-based approach can be useful in understanding participants' experiences.

The participants' descriptions of this theme are given in the coming three sub-themes, namely the child/ren were allegedly abused or neglected; the participants were unable to provide adequate care, and the child/ren manifested behavioural problems.

Sub-theme 1.1: The child/ren were allegedly abused or neglected

Some participants stated that the reason for the removal of the child/ren from their homes was alleged abuse or neglect, as demonstrated by the following responses:

“One day when I came back from Mpumalanga, the sister told me that the child has complained that the father touched her on the private part...I called the child and she explained to me. I was scared because sometimes one cannot trust men” [Agnes 57-68]

“...Then when she was asked why she don’t want to be bathed on the private parts the child said her father touched her... then I received a call from the social worker...She said to me that there are allegations that my child was sexually abused...She said now we are removing her” [Agnes 92-146].

Merry described how allegations of her neglecting her children were the reason why the children were removed:

“They end up calling the social workers telling them that I am not taking care of the children, that I do not clean, and I do not do their laundry as well” [Merry 16-26].

Sharon also gave the reason for her children being removed as alleged neglect:

“So, the social workers came and unfortunately when they came, they found everything that was reported exactly as it was reported to them. Honestly speaking on the first day I was not there and even on the second day when they came to fetch the children [meaning she left the children alone] ... The children did not bath...” [Sharon 18-31].

Based on the extracts above from the participants, it is clear that these children were neglected or abused. This correlates with Johannisen, Van Wyk and Yates (2021:377), who state that many South African children continue to be confronted with obstacles on their path to adulthood. These obstacles include, but are not limited to, poverty, gangsterism, various forms of abuse such as sexual abuse, emotional abuse and physical abuse, violence, exploitation and the HIV/Aids pandemic. Children may experience these contextual challenges directly or be exposed to them within their families and communities.

Strydom, Schiller and Orme (2020:383) state that childhood violence and neglect is of serious concern. They indicate that around the world approximately three out of four children between the ages of two and four (300 million in total) are regularly violently disciplined by caregivers. Another 15 million adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 have been sexually assaulted (Strydom, et al 2020:383). Similarly, Potgieter and Hoosain (2018:438) state that “in South Africa millions of children are placed in CYCCs, shelters and children’s homes as a result of abuse, neglect, HIV/Aids, abandonment, parents

being incapable of looking after their children, relationship problems in the family, and problems and difficulties of the child”.

The researcher is of the opinion that in circumstances where children are abused or neglected, it is prudent for them to be removed and be placed in alternative care such as a CYCC to prevent them from experiencing this mistreatment from their families or communities.

Sub-theme 1.2: Participants were unable to provide adequate care

Several participants explained that the children were removed because they were unable to care for the children for a variety of reasons. The following storylines indicate that participants were unable to care for their children due to either physical illness or mental disorder for which they needed medical care.

“My sister was sick...I got a call from her whilst I was at work telling me that they had taken her four kids” [Brendan 12-30].

Ethel explained how her mother’s illness was the reason for the children’s removal:

“My mom was sick, and she was not able to take care of the children and again her condition traumatised the children and when the social workers came to our home, they said they must be removed because my mother’s illness was becoming worse and they are still minors...” [Ethel 17-28].

Kobus and his wife were unable to care for their children and instead of the children being removed from their care, the parents asked the DSD to place the children in a CYCC.

“...their mother got sick and...I am working for a construction company and now the problem we had was that we had no place of our own to stay, so the children could not stay with their mother because of her sickness...we received a call from the school that the children are behaving strangely these days due to the fact that they could not cope with their mother’s sickness. We had just discovered that the mother is suffering from mental illness” [Kobus 9-41].

Child protection services include the services rendered when a child is at risk (abuse, neglect) and in need of care and protection, as set out in Section 150 of the Children's Act. This research is concerned with children who had to be removed because their safety and wellbeing were in jeopardy as a result of abuse or neglect, and where any delay in removing such children would place them at risk of further harm (Hope & Van Wyk 2018:421). In accordance with the above, the reason these children were removed was because their mothers were sick and were unable to provide adequate care for the children. This put the children at risk as they were exposed to the dangers of child neglect and even abuse.

Sub-theme 1.3: The child/ren manifested behaviour problems

According to Lischka et al (2018:81), human activities are affected by external and internal influences within the social system. Participants reported that the children were removed from their parental care because they displayed behavioural problems that the participants could not control, which affected them as is indicated in the storylines below:

Gugu described the reason for her son being removed from her care in this way:

"He was a naughty child. He used to go to school and not come back home and if he comes back, we give him food and then he will go away again and badmouth us by saying that we don't give him food and that we often shout at him, things like that" [Gugu 26-34].

Two other participants shared similar stories:

"...she is naughty, she didn't listen and so my dad gave her a hiding...there was a problem with her at school and at home. She was rebellious and she didn't come anymore, she would walk out from school and just didn't come home" [Tiny 22-33].

"She was a person who liked going to the streets and she was not coming back home and she was not attending school. The transport was picking her here at home but she was not entering the school yard, so I was actually worried about her education and her wellbeing because the area that we are living in is not safe anymore" [Yolanda 14-22].

One participant indicated that her children were taken or removed as they did not attend school:

“My children were removed because they were not attending school and I was informed that they are being removed so that I can be assisted in getting them to attend the school” [Linda 19-27].

“Children’s behavioural problems in early childhood tend to persist and also have an impact on their social competency, peer relationships and friendship quality later in life” (Choi & Becher 2019:405). Furthermore, according to Cooley, Thompson and Newell (2019:299), specific behaviours can be particularly challenging to caregivers. Sanner and Neece (2018:591) indicate that while the majority of the literature addresses child behavioural problems as predictors of parental stress, the relation can be bi-directional. It is likely that parental stress affects parenting behaviour, which subsequently contributes to a child’s behavioural problems. In accordance with the above, when children become continuously unruly and uncontrollable in their infancy their future may be affected. The researcher believes that it is important to deal with behavioural problems because they may affect or ruin the child’s future if not immediately attended to.

THEME 2: PARTICIPANTS’ ACCOUNTS OF WHEN AND WHY THEY VISITED THEIR CHILDREN IN THE CYCC

The ecosystems perspective explains the ways in which “environments affect people and how people affect their environment” (Masilo et al 2021:3). This relates to the participants’ experiences as they were affected by the fact that their children were removed from their care and placed at the CYCC, and they visited their children for different reasons. The strength-based approach focuses on the strength of individuals rather than on their problems and is a useful helping strategy that builds on a person’s positive adaptation (Pulickal 2020:8–9). This relates to the participants’ experiences as they had the strength to visit their children in the CYCCs after the children were removed from their care, and they chose to adapt positively and not focus on their problems.

Parent-child interaction and visits are used to help support relationships between parents and their children who have been removed from their care, and to develop reunification (Downes et al 2016:1241-248). The first principle of “therapeutic visiting” is that birth

parents can be important allies in treating their children in alternative care, as an ongoing relationship with their parents is expected to benefit children who have been separated from their families (Palmer, Durham & Osmond 2017:37). The researcher believes that it is essential for parents and children to maintain contact during separation as this will build and maintain strong bonds between them and facilitate successful reunification.

Participants were asked when they visited their child/ren in the CYCC and the reasons behind their visits. The frequency of the participants' visits to the child or children and the participants' justifications and reasons for doing so are two sub-themes that emerged from their responses to this question.

Sub-theme 2.1: Frequency of participants' visits to the child/ren

Only ten participants answered this question. The participants' responses to the question on the frequency of their visits to the child/ren in the CYCC ranged from not having visited at all to having visited every week (described in separate categories).

Category 2.1.1: Participants had not visited the child/ren

Three of the participants had not visited their child/ren at all during the period they have been at the CYCC but mentioned that they contacted the children telephonically to support and build their relationships and to work towards reunification.

Rejoice, whose children had been at the CYCC for nine months at the time of the interview, had not visited her children:

"I don't have the strength to go there because Boitumelo [pseudonym] (the social worker) told me not to go there. But because I already went to court, I was told that I can go and see them..." [Rejoice 37– 39].

Gugu, who visited her son for the first time three to four years after he had been placed in the CYCC, said:

"...last year his social worker Paul [pseudonym] came to me and told me that I should go and visit him (her son) because if I don't, how can he come to visit us at home..." [Gugu 41- 45].

David said he does not visit his son but phones him:

“We tend to call him to check if he is well. In most cases we don’t visit him, but we call him and greet him and ask him how it is at school...” [David 60-62].

It is beneficial for parents to maintain contact with their child/ren, as this increases the likelihood of family reunification to take place (Australia 2013:1). Potgieter and Hoosain (2018:445) state that if parents are not encouraged to maintain contact, family reunification could be affected. Furthermore, Kanamugire and Mbao (2021:90) indicate that a child has the right to maintain personal relationships and regular direct contacts with both parents. In keeping with the aforesaid, family reunification is encouraged, if not reintegration of the child into the family might be negatively affected.

Category 2.1.2: Participants visited the child/ren at least once a month

Five of the participants visited their child/ren at least once a month during the period they have been at the CYCC. It seems that that the participants wanted to be reunified with their children as they made sure they visit them at least once a month even though they had financial challenges. Participants indicated the main reason for not visiting more regularly as being a lack of money.

Ethel said:

“I visit them once a month” [Ethel 34].

Yolanda said that she visits her daughter monthly, depending on her financial situation:

“I visit her when I can. If I have money, I come. Most of the time I come” [Yolanda 29-30].

Finances were also an issue for Linda:

“I am able to come every month but only when I have money. You know that money is not always available and sometimes I don’t see them for a while” [Linda 48-50].

As mentioned before, visits and contact among family members ensure that these links are maintained and improved (Urrea Monclus et al 2020:4). Regular contact is therefore an important aspect of family reunification (Karam 2014:58). However, when they are separated from their children, parents tend to blame environmental factors (lack of economic resources, inadequate housing, etc.) (Balsells et al 2014:817). Participants visiting their children were working towards family reunification and did indeed point to external factors such as lack of money and unemployment when they were not able to visit their children at CYCCs during separation. The researcher believes that it is understandable that parents sometimes do not manage to visit their children due to a lack of finances, especially when they are unemployed. These situations may affect their relationship with their children, and therefore social workers should collaborate with them and help them find ways to deal with such challenges.

Category 2.2.3 The participants visited the child/ren every week.

Two of the participants visited the child/ren every week. Hilda explained as follows:

“I only visit them every week when I have money because I am not working. They must always see me because they want me” [Hilda 147-158].

Kobus tries to visit every week:

“Every time, every Sunday when I have a chance, unless I am out of town like now” [Kobus 44-49].

The quality and quantity of visits and contact between parents and their children directly influence the family reunification process (Urrea Monclus et al 2020:4). Furthermore, maintaining contact with the child increases the likelihood of family reunification, as contact keeps parents informed (Australia 2013:1). According to Rashid and Al-Haj Baddar (2019:4), evidence shows that strengths play a role in growth even in dire circumstances. In consonance with this, the participants showed their strength in ensuring that they visited their children every week when it was possible. It seems that participants were really motivated to see their children unless there were serious challenges like lack of money or being out of the town.

Sub-theme 2.2 Participants' reasons for visiting the child/ren.

response to the question why they visited their children at the CYCC, participants said that they needed and missed their children, and also that they loved them.

Families mobilise existing strengths within themselves and the community through meaningful relationships, improving child safety and family wellbeing (Allott, 2021:9). In accord with the strengths perspective, the participants realised their available capacity to pursue their valuable relations with their children as they shared the reasons to go and visit them in CYCCs.

“Individual behaviour is driven by various individual attributes, ranging from general (values) to specific (attitudes, personal norms) cognitive influences, as well as socio-demographic characteristics, emotions, previous experience and genes” (Lischka et al 2018:6). According to the person-centred approach, behaviour displayed by the person, which may be intended to satisfy their needs, is normally accompanied by emotions. And in most cases people would want to behave in a way that fit with who they believe they are or the way they perceive themselves (Grobler, Schenck & Mbedzi 2013:17–30).

In consonance with the above, people's behaviour is motivated by their need. In this case, the parents' needs of missing, loving and wanting to be with their child/ren motivated them to go and visit their child/ren at the CYCCs.

Category 2.2.1: Participants needed and missed the child/ren.

It is clear from the storylines of nine participants that they needed and missed their children.

“It is because I miss them. I feel pain. I am unable to sleep and I don't even eat as well. I am used to have them at home listening to their noise and I enjoy being with them. I don't have love and peace when I don't have them” [Hilda 161-164].

Yolanda described her reasons as follows:

“I miss her but at the same time I am not sure if she has really changed or not, so I can ask them to bring her back home” [Yolanda 30-41].

And for Agnes:

“We need her and we want her back because we miss her” [Agnes 19].

“Parent-child attachment is fundamental for the child’s health and wellbeing, not only in early childhood, but throughout life” (Singer & Brodzinsky 2020:154). The authors further state that “frequent and ongoing visitation between the parent and child helps to ameliorate some of the relationship disruption, supports children’s emotional wellbeing and facilitates a more successful reunification process”. Furthermore, parental visits are regarded as an important means of maintaining the parent-child relationship and they are a strong predictor of family reunification prospects (Fossum, Vis & Holtan 2018:1). Fossum et al (2018:8) further state that “attachment is regarded as important because it reflects the relationship between the child and the caregiver early in the child’s development as well as being associated with the child’s social functioning later in life”.

In accordance with the above, the parents were motivated to visit their children because they needed and missed them and by doing so, they wanted to maintain their bond with their children. The researcher is of the opinion that it is important for parents and their children to remain attached while the children are still young and that it is normal for a parent to need and miss their children during separation.

Category 2.2.2: Participants loved their child/ren.

Participants expressed how they loved their children and wanted their children to know they loved them and that was the reason they visited them.

“The reason for visiting them is to show them that I still love them” [Ethel 34].

Merry and Sharon shared why they visit their children:

“...because I want to know how they are, where they are staying and if they are wellcared for because I love them” [Merry 32-33].

“The reason to visit them is to show them our love because we also miss them” [Sharon 34-41].

“Parents are typically disposed to continue loving the child, and so to invest in the parent-child relationship despite significant changes in their values, ambitions and life circumstances” (Ferracioli 2018:83). Furthermore, parental love appreciates and cares about the child and does not abandon the child (Määttä & Satu 2012:1). Moreover, “parental warmth – also referred to by terms such as “acceptance, affection, care, comfort, concern, nurturance, support, or simply love” characterises the affective quality of parent-child interactions and relationships” (Li 2020:2). From a strength perspective, the researcher postulates that the participants realised their strength (which is the love they have for their children) and this motivated them to show this love by visiting their children.

THEME 3: PARTICIPANTS’ ACCOUNTS OF THE FREQUENCY OF THEIR CHILD/REN’S VISITS TO THEIR HOMES

After explaining when and why they visited their child/ren at the CYCC, participants were asked to describe how often their child/ren came to their home for visits. Their accounts in response to this question are given in two categories, namely child/ren who had not visited and those who visit during school holidays.

According to Njwambe, Cocks and Vetter (2019:418), “‘home’ is a symbolic space of familiarity, comfort, security and emotional attachment. It represents an emotional space that is closely linked to some of our earliest psychological experiences, and it carries memories of childhood, connections to family of origin and cultural and ethnic roots”. Furthermore, Fossum, Vis and Holtan (2018:1) argue that “social workers should emphasise the quality and short- and long-term consequences of visits for children when making decisions regarding the frequency of visits with birth parents”. Additionally, home-visiting programmes identified, teach new parenting skills or behaviours as a core component affecting parenting behaviour, and may also serve as an important factor related to outcomes such as child development and, physical health (Filene et al 2013:1). In terms of Section 168(2) of the Children’s Act, if a child has been placed in alternative care under the supervision of a designated social worker, a leave of absence for a child from care may only be granted with the approval of that social worker. Although the

researcher agrees with the literature cited above that it is necessary for children in alternative care to visit their parents' homes regularly, both to facilitate their own wellbeing and to benefit parents by giving them the opportunity to practice new parenting skills, the social workers' decisions should ensure the safety and the child's best interests.

Sub-theme 3.1: Child/ren had not visited.

Five of the parents stated that their child/ren had not visited them at their home.

“No, she is not visiting us for now but the social worker said she will make arrangements for her to visit us during the weekends and school holidays”
[Agnes 27-28].

Ethel had a similar experience:

“They have not visited us yet. The time they came home it was during our mother’s funeral and that was the only time they came; they have not visited us again” **[Ethel 42-44].**

Tiny explained the situation in this way:

“She is not allowed to come home until the 20th of November when we go to court again. The reason for not visiting at home is because of my husband”
[Tiny 43-47].

The reasons for home visits not taking place could vary. For instance, the court could have ruled against the child/ren visiting the parents, the parents could have died or the parents could have not shown up for their scheduled visits (Fossum, et al 2018:5). Furthermore, Kanamugire and Mbao (2021:89) stress that social workers should “respect the right of the child who is separated from one or both parents to maintain personal relationships and direct contact with both parents on a regular basis, except if it is contrary to the child’s best interests”. The researcher wants to emphasise the importance of children having sustainable relations with other family members where parents have died or where contact with parents is not in the child's best interests. Therefore, social workers should investigate and recommend that children visit other family members where parents are deceased or contact is not possible so the children can be reunified with family.

Sub-theme 3.2: Child/ren visited during school holidays.

A number of participants recounted that their children visited them at their homes during school holidays.

David's son visited his family during school holidays:

"He only comes during the school holidays when he knows that he will stay for a longer period..." [David 71-82].

"They visit me during the school holidays...During the school holidays I am always with them" [Linda 94-98].

"...they came for school holidays...They must come and visit me because I am their mother. They are supposed to come home" [Rejoice 46-49].

"Parent-child separation has consistently negative effects on children's social- emotional development, wellbeing and mental health" (Waddoups, Yoshikawa & Strouf 2019:387). Furthermore, Potgieter and Hoosain (2018:438) state that "children in CYCCs are encouraged to visit their parents over weekends and during school holidays". In addition, the Consolidated regulations pertaining to the Children's Act, 2005 (DSD 2010b: Section 58(1)) refers to conditions for granting a leave of absence of a child from alternative care: "a leave of absence may, subject to sub-regulation (2), be granted to a child in alternative care in terms of Section 168(1) of the Act at any time and for a period not exceeding six weeks at any given moment".

The researcher agrees with the literature mentioned that the children will be able to grow well physically, emotionally and socially when they are regularly in contact with their parents, and it is therefore essential that they are able to visit their parents during school holidays whenever it is safe and in their best interest.

THEME 4: PARTICIPANTS' DESCRIPTIONS OF THEIR EXPERIENCES OF REUNIFICATION SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE FIELD SOCIAL WORKER

The researcher asked participants to describe their experiences of reunification services provided by the field social worker. The participants' responses in terms of their experiences are given in three sub-themes, namely, received no reunification services; negative experiences; and positive experiences.

Social work intervention in the form of reunification services can be understood from an ecosystemic perspective. Social work is a profession that focuses on social reactions to a changing environment and social workers are experts in understanding people's experience, mobilising groups, intervening in social systems, and advancing social policy change (Encyclopedia of Social Work 2019:1). Social work can assist a client from a strength-based experiences, particularly in relation to what is referred to as "the revolutionary possibility of hope". (Turner 2020:15). According to Neil, Gitsels and Thoburn (2020:548), international human rights and child rights conventions require that children in care should be returned home to one or both parents wherever possible.

Section 187 of the Children's Act, as amended, clearly states that "a child in need of care and protection should be removed with the view that reunification between the child and the biological parents is possible and is in the child's best interest".

Furthermore, Potgieter and Hoosain (2018:438) suggest that family circumstances should be stabilised and the child be reunited with his/her biological parents. In addition, Mateos et al (2018:574) argue that "reunification services require professional support of families who are under temporary protection, with the goal of reunification, to help families re-establish their family dynamics". Not having this support, the circumstances that contributed to child abuse and neglect will probably persist.

Sub-theme 4.1: Participants received no reunification services from field social workers

Family reunification services are hindered during statutory removal, where the transfer of cases seemed to result in social workers rushing to drop the child at a CYCC (Hope & Van

Wyk 2018:426). The investigative nature of child protection (sudden, immediate and intrusive) can also have a negative effect on the relationship between the family and the social worker (Hope & Van Wyk 2018:426). Moreover, for families with removed youth, the process of reunification and behaviour change is typically coordinated by a case worker who refers parents to appropriate service providers and, ideally, continues to partner with the families throughout the process. However, “the reality is that child welfare workers are not always able to be fully engaged partners with their families because of high caseloads” (Chambers et al 2019:3).

In accordance with the above, most of the participants responded that they had received no reunification services from the field social worker and some complained that they had not even seen the field social worker after the child/ren were removed from their care:

“The thing is we have never communicated with the social workers, since they removed the children and they said they will come back to me but they did not come back to me” [Ethel 98-101].

Brendan also had no contact:

“We haven’t had any contact with these people [field social workers] since the time they took the kids, that was the only time...I cannot say anything because I haven’t met with them not even once” [Brendan 57-61]

Feziwe, whose son had been in the CYCC for 13 years (since 2006), said she had received no reunification services from the field social worker:

“They have not assisted us with anything...I am referring to Florence [pseudonym]...It is the social worker from our vicinity [field social worker]” [Feziwe 84-87].

“The interaction between the family and the professional is a key factor in successful reunification, emphasising the importance of communication based on mutual trust and not on unbalanced relations” (Balsells et al 2014:819). Furthermore, Hope and Van Wyk (2018:429–432) indicate that family reunification services are hindered by certain challenges intrinsic to social work, such as high levels of stress, high caseloads and a shortage of social workers in the country, which further contributes to high caseloads

and a lack of resources.

The authors add that, as a result of the challenges within the various systems, current interventions are rushed, crisis oriented and of a 'drop-and-go' nature, resulting in insufficient emotional care being directed towards the child and family. In consonance with the above, social workers are experiencing challenges that can hinder reunification assistance or services. It is therefore vital for social workers and families to communicate regularly so they can update one another to encourage reunification.

Sub-theme 4.2: Participants reported negative experiences with field social workers.

A number of participants recounted how they had contact with the field social workers, but they experienced this contact negatively. Their responses can be divided into two categories, namely, participants felt they were treated unfairly or were pressurised, and participants reported no communication with field social workers, whom they experienced as unhelpful. Although the participants were asked about reunification services, it was clear that they have not worked through the fact that the children were removed. It is also clear from the participants responses that they did not want to focus on the reunification services, but they wanted to reflect and discuss about the fact that the children are taken away.

Category 4.2.1: Participants felt they were treated unfairly or were pressurised.

The participants expressed their negative experiences in interacting with the social work systems, as they felt that the social workers did not treat them well, were not understanding and were judgmental. Participants felt helpless. The following quotations show that participants felt their field social workers had treated them unfairly or had pressurised them.

Brendan felt it was unfair to have removed the children in the first place, especially in the manner it was done:

"...I'm blaming them that they shouldn't have taken her kids (his sister's children) the way they did" [Brendan 29-32].

Kobus also experienced pressure being exerted by the field social worker:

“And I will be telling her how our condition is, for instance that the situation is still the same and that on the other hand, the mother is mentally ill...On top of that, social workers would give us pressure telling that we should find a place to stay and that the children must stay with us or else they will be removed and be placed outside the province. Basically, these are the things that hurt us a lot thinking that social workers should be people who help you and not giving us pressure and you remain powerless to tell her (the social worker) that you seem to imply that we are not doing anything. Yes, I have received pressure from the social workers. Instead of receiving services, we received pressure” [Kobus 106-137].

Rejoice referred to the field social worker as unfair when she removed the children:

“I don't see anything good because some social workers are not working well...Because they just remove the children without any reason” [Rejoice 93-99].

In a study done in the UK to improve reunification practice for children returning from care to their parents, parents indicated that they often disliked being monitored by social workers, feeling that they were “digging for dirt” on them and that control was provided without any accompanying encouragement (Farmer 2014:355). Furthermore, in a study conducted in China, titled *Parents' experiences during the family reunification process*, many parents indicated that their negotiations with child protection workers were negative and traumatic, resulting in the protection workers forming further negative images of the parents as caregivers (Wong 2016:339).

Moreover, in a study of the voices of families and social workers in the family reunification system, which was done at the Walden Family Services Centre in San Bernardino (California) states that “the ideal social worker should be able to promptly

connect parents with the appropriate resources and do their best to assist the parents with their needs” (Bernal 2017:21–22).

The author further states the results of her study were that “all of the parents agreed that an ideal social worker should be understanding and should try to be objective. Three out of four parents felt that their social worker always seemed to be judging them and was not motivating the parents enough to make real changes in their lives, three out of four parents expressed that their experience working with their social worker had been negative overall” (Bernal 2017:21–22).

The researcher is of the opinion that it is important for social workers to be able to create a safe space for the clients so that they can feel their experiences are understood. Participants may then not feel unfairly treated and they will not blame the social worker for removing their children.

Category 4.2.2: Participants reported no communication with field social workers whom they experienced as unhelpful.

Participants claimed that they had no contact with the field social workers as the field social workers did not communicate with them or even gave them a detailed explanation of why their children were removed. They felt left out of the legal process and had unanswered questions. Field social workers were experienced as unhelpful. It is evident that social workers lacked communication skills as indicated by the following quotations:

“These people [social workers] removed the children and that was all they did. No one has ever bothered to explain to me if there is any procedure that we will follow” [Ethel 92-93].

Tiny referred specifically to the lack of communication:

“Not good...communication, Ja, that’s the most...there must be communication around the people, especially around social workers and parents. There is none. There is nobody giving you answers. I can understand that they work and they’ve got a lot of cases that I do understand. Sometimes the people like me and especially the ones outside, we need answers” [Tiny 79-84].

“She [the field social worker] doesn’t talk a lot about how I am feeling or if my child comes back how am I going forward...So I don’t get encouragement

from the field social worker. She just calls me to tell me about the court date and tells me that we will meet at court...they don't involve us and I feel left out"
[Yolanda 68-109].

A study on child welfare and successful reunification through the socio-educative process, done in Spain, found that "the interaction between the family and the professional is a key factor in successful reunification, emphasising the importance of communication based on mutual trust and not on unbalanced power relations" (Balsells et al 2014:811).

Furthermore, a study assessing the needs of reunified families found that "parents' voices and perspectives are rarely found in the reunification discussion and that although they comprise one-half of this vital caretaking equation, their needs, concerns and expertise from their perspective around reunification go largely unheard" (Stephens et al 2016:11).

In a study on good professional practices for promoting positive parenting and child participation in reunification processes, also done in Spain, it was indicated that "good practices in the promotion of positive parenting require professionals to possess certain abilities and attitudes that help them establish ties with families, which, in turn, facilitate an effective reunification" (Mateos et al 2018:575). Moreover, the author further state that, these practices establish open and honest communication, commitment, respect, trust, and collaborative relationship with family (Mateos et al 2018:575).

In conforming to the above, the researcher is of the opinion that establishing open lines of communication between social workers and parents, instead of a relationship based on power and imbalance, will encourage parents to participate in reunification. The researcher believes that it is vital for social workers to work together with parents and children and let parents feel unconditionally respected and accepted.

Sub-theme 4.3: Participants reported positive experiences with field social workers.

From the participants' interviews, it was evident that a few participants had positive experiences with the reunification services provided by their field social workers because the social workers worked in collaboration with participants and, as a result, the participants seemed to have benefited from the programmes and services provided by social workers.

Merry had three different field social workers and she spoke of her positive experiences:

"They [the field social workers] are not the same, some of them you can see that they want to assist in reunifying you with your children... (for example) Sister Ruth [pseudonym] is able to call me, sit down with me and tell me that I should try to be fine so that I can prove them wrong for removing my children" **[Merry 90-102].**

"They were able to teach me how to take care of my children and be the mother to my children and not neglect my children. They taught me what a child is... they have really helped me because I was in a situation that was not going to help me with anything. I was going to end up losing my children and with their help I will be reunified with my children..." **[Merry 120-128].**

Sharon appreciated that the field social worker enabled visits for her and her son, but did not say anything about reunification services as such:

"The first thing that they made simple for me is that they made it possible for my child to come and visit me and again they made it possible for me to go and visit my child so I can spend time with him... The social workers sat with us and told us that we need to keep the house clean and that there must be food and everything must be in order" **[Sharon 68-108].**

Agnes also had a positive experience that didn't relate directly to reunification:

"She asked me if I need counselling because she can see that this issue has hurt me. Then I said yes, it hurt me a lot, I need counselling" **[Agnes 190-191].**

Based on a study on how to encourage biological parents' involvement in their children's group homes, Sulimani-Aidan (2018:182) stipulates those social workers teaching parenting skills, including praising appropriate behaviour, ignoring mildly disruptive behaviour, and providing nurturing social interactions produce positive outcomes. Furthermore, a comprehensive programme for healing and family reunification in Manitoba, Canada, provided a life programme as a process for family reunification, and parents and children were given support and mentoring to ensure successful reunification (Deane et al 2018:37). Moreover, "concern and interest in parenting support have grown in the past couple of decades, and formal programmes for parents have been created and expanded in many countries, including parental counselling, lectures and online resources" (Barboza et al 2021:1381). Based on the above the researcher is of the view that parental programmes are essential and when social workers work collaboratively with parents, parents will benefit from the programmes and services provided by social workers to ensure successful reunification.

THEME 5: PARTICIPANTS' DESCRIPTIONS OF THEIR EXPERIENCES OF REUNIFICATION SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE CYCC SOCIAL WORKER

The researcher requested the participants to share their impressions of the reunification services rendered by CYCC social worker.

The person-in-environment must be examined to recognise the influence of environmental factors in human functioning (Oberholzer 2021:75). By understanding the parents within their environment, social workers will be able to identify appropriate intervention strategies when rendering reunification services. Furthermore, by focusing on strengths, people find hope and inspiration and have a stronger sense of wellbeing (Pulickal 2020:8–9).

To do justice to the participants' voices, their answers are provided in four sub-themes, and that is the child/ren were well cared for by the CYCC; participants had no contact with CYCC social workers; participants had minimal contact with CYCC social workers; and participants reported positive experiences with social workers from CYCCs.

Sub-theme 5.1: Participants they were thankful for the care that CYCC provided to their children.

Most of the participants were pleased with the care the children received from the CYCCs and observed the strengths of the system. This is clear from the storylines given below.

“They [the CYCC social workers] assisted me with the education that they gave to my child by enabling him to go to school. I will be happy if my child can go to school and be educated so that next time when I want him back home, he will be an educated child just like other children...when I took the child there, he was sick and they managed to take him to hospital and make sure that he was back to normal. Now he is a child like other children and that is something that I am thankful for because even now he undergoes treatment and they take him for this treatment even though I am not there” [David 107-117].

“Well, I can say they have placed them in a right place and when I see them, I get satisfied and I am happy” [Ethel 98-101].

“...the changes they have made to her is what I appreciate from the centre social workers and they have done a good work” [Yolanda 136-138].

The National Residential Child Care Standards were developed to provide dimensions of the quality of care as well as to give minimum standards to be followed by residential childcare facilities or institutions (Mhongera & Lombard 2018:55). According to Sulimani-Aidan (2018:181), “the statutory system’s main interest is first to offer a safeplace for the children to address their emotional and behavioural status, educational gaps, and the difficult transition from their home to care”.

Furthermore, within the CYCC, as a mesosystem, all disciplines, including social workers and panel members, must work together if the welfare of children in care is to be effectively promoted (Shaw & Frost 2013:135). The researcher is convinced that the basic emotional, psychological, behavioural and educational needs of children in CYCCs must be addressed, otherwise this may lead to children having increased emotional and

developmental problems.

Sub-theme 5.2: Participants received no services from CYCC social workers.

As indicated in the quotations below, there were participants who responded that they received no reunification services from the CYCC social worker. It seems that some participants were not clear on the identity and role of the field social workers on the one side and the CYCC social workers on the other side.

“...I have not seen them and the last time when I came, there were other ladies here and they are the ones who brought the children here” [Brendan 159-161].

“With the social workers at the centre we only meet concerning the children’s behaviour” [Kobus 141-160].

“I think there is nothing. There is no help for the parents outside. There is no help! That’s the problem! I am not allowed to see where she sleeps. I am not allowed to see where she eats. Maybe sometimes there is a family day but it’s not always possible to come to a family day because it is during the week” [Tiny 116-124].

In a study of parents’ experiences of family reunification services, parents expressed the following as challenging: the unavailability and inaccessibility of the designated social worker, the lack of information about the child in out-of-home care, and the lack of involvement” (Potgieter & Hoosain 2018:447).

In the study conducted by Bernal (2017:20) on family reunification, parents emphasised that “they often did not feel that their social workers reached out to them enough and were not available or flexible enough to build a relationship with them as parents”. Bernal adds that, “from a macrosocial work practice perspective, there are many systemic barriers that hinder social workers and parents from being successful in the reunification process”. Wiso, Melke and Josephson (2022:748) confirm that parents of children in out-of-home care receive little support from social services.

Based on this, it seems that parents experience social workers as being inaccessible and indifferent to them, and that they feel detached from the social workers who are supposed to support them. The researcher's opinion is that the social workers ought to be accessible and empathetic to parents as this will help social workers realise that they, as social workers, are committed to assisting parents in the reunification process.

Sub-theme 5.3: Participants had minimal contact with CYCC social workers.

The responses from some participants reflected that they had minimal contact with the CYCC social workers. The social workers were either not available or sometimes resorted to telephonic contact with the participants. The participants were aware that there is a social worker allocated to them even though they had minimal contact with the social worker. This is clearly indicated by the storylines given below.

“To be honest with you I can say since then, most of the time when the schools are closed it's his aunt who goes to fetch him not me, so I have never met the social workers face-to-face and we have never sat down and talked. I do have contact with them but in most cases when I call them to check how is the child doing and sometimes, they do call me when the school is about to close and they will be telling me that the child has finished writing the exams and that when we want him, we can come and fetch him for school holidays” [David 131-141].

“From the centre social workers when I went there, they do not allow parents to visit children during the week because they say children are going to school and we will disturb them. When we go there during the weekend, we don't find the social worker. I only saw her in September when I went to collect the children for school holidays” [Merry 58-62].

Research based on family reunification indicated that, in social workers' work conditions, there are obstacles to establishing a good relationship with the parents, such as high caseloads and a lack of worker continuity, leading to a decrease in contact between the social worker and the families (Chambers et al 2018:41). Smith and Lidström (2020:11) found in their study on reunification that the social workers' working conditions with high

caseloads make them inaccessible to families. A study conducted by SOU (2015:71) found that parents were not appointed a social worker and did not receive the support to which they were entitled. The researcher believes that it is essential that more social workers be employed so that there can be sufficient personnel (social workers) to render services. Should the mentioned challenges surrounding social work continue, parents may be discouraged from participating in the reunification process, which may lead to unsuccessful reunification.

Sub-theme 5.4: Participants reported positive experiences with CYCC social workers.

Some participants reported positive experiences with regard to the reunification assistance or services which is provided by the social workers at the CYCC. In their interviews, the participants mentioned how the social workers were good to them, providing support and motivation, and as a result the outcome was successful parenting skills. These positive experiences are clearly indicated in the storylines given below.

“...at least they comfort me as a parent. When you go there, they don’t just leave you, they comfort you about many things by telling you to try and change the situation and you will be reunified with your child and that your child is in good hands and he will be cared for at all times” [Sharon 106-119].

“They spoke to me that I should not hold grudges for my son like when he used to badmouth me and say I’m not his mother” [Gugu 98-104].

“They spoke to me in private and then after I left, they spoke to the child in private as well...this is what went well. Even me they gave me skills so I can be next to the child and know that he is a child and he needs my love as a parent” [Gugu 143-154].

According to the Tsosoloso Place of Safety CYCC (DSD, 2018), the CYCC social worker has to establish contact with the child’s family or next of kin telephonically and through a home visit to gather more information that will assist in the therapeutic intervention. The social worker has to maintain contact with the field social worker telephonically to share

information about the progress of the case within the family and in the institution.

One of the findings of Bernal's (2017:22) study on the voices of families and social workers in the family reunification system, showed that some parents had a great experience, felt supported and motivated. Moreover, Sulimani-Aidan (2018:180), found that CYCC social workers "forming a good relationship with the parents is likely to encourage placement stability and might also lead to family reunification when integrated successfully with positive professional interventions".

The researcher is of the opinion that regular and meaningful input from the social workers at the CYCC will indicate a commitment to reunification, which will motivate parents to participate fully in the process. This may be productive if they can work hand in hand with field social workers.

THEME 6: PARTICIPANTS' DESCRIPTIONS OF THEIR NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS IN TERMS OF REUNIFICATION SERVICES

After describing their experiences with reunification (services) or assistance, participants were requested to explain their needs and expectations relating to reunification services. The responses to this question are given in four sub-themes focusing on participants' need for and expectation of: clear and regular communication with social workers; guidance and understanding from social workers; practical assistance and information from social workers; and to have their child/ren placed back in their care.

For social workers to support parents with the challenges affecting their families, provide support, facilitate change and ultimately benefit the children or young people involved, they need to understand the parents within their environments and get to know their strengths (Williams 2019:556). Social workers should thus be aware of participants' needs, experiences and expectations so they can be able to provide support and facilitate change that will benefit both parents and children during reunification.

Abdulla, Pretorius and Goliath (2020:46) stipulate that "parents need access to formal support on an ongoing basis, guided by their needs, rather than only when professionals are available or identify a need". The authors further state that parents should determine the type of support and services they need, from which professional they need the support

and when they need it (Abdulla et al2020:46). “Family reunification services are linked to therapeutic skills such as empathy, active listening and reflection of feelings” (Zimba 2017).

This implies that interventions that are aimed at building a trusting working relationship with the client and improving the client's family circumstances and abilities prove to be more efficient than interventions that are directed solely at therapeutic goals.

The researcher is of the opinion that it is essential for social workers to apply these therapeutic skills, allow self-determination and collaborate with parents to promote successful reunification.

Sub-theme 6.1: Participants needed and expected clear and regular communication with social workers.

Linked to their experience of inadequate or no communication with social workers as referred to under previous themes, the majority of the participants explained that what they needed and expected most was clear and regular communication. Participants wanted information on what is expected of them and what is happening in their children's lives, and they wanted social workers to know their backgrounds.

Brendan emphasised the need for communication:

“I want to be assisted. At least if there can be someone who can assist me because I don't know where else to go. Even if it can be one person who can tell me that when you want the children, you do this and that or you fill any form, I have not seen them again” [Brendan 236-256].

Ethel echoed these sentiments:

“They should communicate with the children's families...They should be able to update us about things that are happening because there are things/ incidents that are happening and normally I hear about them after they have passed” [Ethel 111-115].

Feziwe had a similar need:

“They should communicate with us on regular basis and remind us...” [Feziwe 134- 137].

According to Balsells et al (2013:1), removal from the family nucleus is expected to be temporary. Furthermore, Bernal (2017:20–21), in her study of voices of parents during reunification, indicates that “many times the social worker would tell the parents that they would call them back with information the parents needed, but would not follow through”. In these situations, the participants or their parents felt that they had to follow up with the social worker on a regular basis to get their questions answered.

In the study undertaken by Balsells et al (2014:818), “participants also considered communication between professionals and parents to be important because it provided the latter with support and an outlet”. The results of this study further revealed clear demands for improving this aspect of the reunification process. “Parents requested more regular follow-ups, including more personal contact, meetings, home visits and guidance” (Balsells et al 2014:818).

Additionally, in Potgieter and Hoosain’s (2018:442) study of rendering reunification services, parents indicated that there was a lack of communication between themselves, their child, the designated social worker and the residential staff. Parents noted that they expected more communication between the different stakeholders.

In consonance with the above, separating children from their parents is anticipated to be temporary, and therefore social workers should be in contact with parents regularly. From the storylines and the literature, it is clear that parents feel that social workers are committed to their obligation to support the family if they communicate with the parents regularly and ensure regular follow-ups through personal and telephonic contacts, meetings, and home visits. Regular communication is important because it will encourage parents to participate during reunification services, which will contribute to successful reunification.

Sub-theme 6.2: Participants needed and expected guidance and understanding from social workers.

Participants expressed their need and expectation for social workers to provide them with guidance on parenting skills and understanding that they might lack the necessary knowledge to be good carers. This is clearly indicated by the storylines below:

Yolanda specifically said she needed guidance:

“What I need from social services, it’s guidance. They must try to teach us as parents how to take care of our children. We might think we know but as long as I’m at this point it means I didn’t know. They can educate us more about their work” [Yolanda 234-239].

Furthermore, “...they can give us more information and arrange meetings for parents. Some parents don’t know how...” [Yolanda 248-253].

Kobus stressed the need for understanding:

“...social workers should be more like parents because I saw and I have interacted with some of them here. Some of them...they are pushing profession more than they should. They have the attitude of saying I am a social worker, I want these to happen like this, you can’t question us...” [Kobus 253-274].

David expressed the need for guidance in the form of advice:

“What is important for me is for the child to get educated and also they should give us advice as the child cannot spend his whole life there at the CYCC....” [David 180-186].

Reunification services are essential for resolving family problems and reuniting families (D’Andrade & Nguyen 2014:52). Furthermore, child welfare organisations offer parents and children a range of time-limited programmes that build on family members' strengths and address the issues that led to the removal of the child to help the process of family reunification (Singer & Brodzinsky 2020:154).

The evaluation of a pilot programme in Israel aimed at strengthening and improving the connection between children in care and their parents through parent workshops, 'family days' and a parent-child summer camp, indicated that "the programme improved the parenting skills, strengthened the connection between the staff and the parents, and decreased the children's behavioural problems" (Sulimani-Aidan 2018:180).

Based on their study of family and parenting support during reunification, Daly et al (2015:8) refer to several areas in which parents identified the need for formal assistance, namely, developing parenting skills, overcoming personal difficulties and resolving structural needs. The researchers suggest that if all of the latter can be addressed, the concerns that were the root cause for the child's removal can be addressed, which will contribute to a successful reunification.

Sub-theme 6.3: Participants needed and expected practical assistance and information from social workers.

Practical assistance and information were a very definite need and expectation expressed by many of the participants. The issues with which they needed assistance were linked to the child returning to their home. Most of the participants expected assistance to secure adequate accommodation for their children:

Kobus highlighted the need for assistance with accommodation:

"...there are no services that we have received from the social workers before and what I would like to see is that they must at least push us towards a direction whereby they want us to be reunified with our children like accommodation..."

[Kobus 284-294]

Feziwe expressed a similar need:

"We request the social workers to assist us to find a place to stay and when we have a place to stay then we can take the child" [Feziwe 127-128].

Rejoice wanted practical assistance. As she explained:

“I wish they can assist me to get the RDP house and the piece jobs even if I can get a job of doing laundries at the centres, so I can also assist other children whose parents are abusing them...” [Rejoice 130-142].

Families whose children are placed in care mostly live in poverty and are dependent on social grants (Smith & Lidström 2020:43). The authors further stipulate that when the parents are unemployed, they cannot afford decent houses or to provide for their children. This, in turn, obstructs reunification. Furthermore, literature confirms that “social workers are the biggest team players who work closely with parents to ensure that they have the resources and information needed to complete their reunification plan” (Bernal 2017:2). The author further states that “social workers are required to assess the strengths and needs of the families, which can include empowering parents in their tough journey, connecting homeless parents to housing resources and sending referrals to the agencies for them to obtain the necessary skills” (Bernal 2017:2). Parents use these services to learn what adjustments they should make as well as how to make those changes, which is a major contribution to the help offered by the social services related to child safety (Balsells et al 2014:820). These authors further indicate that parents and families need formal and informal resources, the support from specialists enables them to express their concerns and feel reassured, to satisfy the specific requirements that occur during the reunion process (Balsells et al., 2014:821-822).

The storylines and literature indicate that social workers need to assess the parents' situations and collaborate with them, and to ensure that they have or are connected to the resources and information needed to complete their reunification plan. The researcher believes that it is really vital for social workers to collaborate with parents so they can be aware of their strengths and resources, and to empower them through facilitating reunification.

Sub-theme 6.4: Participants needed and expected their child/ren to be placed back in their care.

Many of the participants expressed that their main need is to have their children returned to their care.

Brendan said no one has properly explained the reunification process:

“...I need to be helped that the children must come back home sister. I don’t know whatelse to do because since that lady told me that she will come back and she said the children will come back in December so I am unable to understand how will the children come back because no one has ever come to us and explain things to us as they have promised that they will come back and they have never come back to us...” [Brendan 167-178].

Gugu spoke of her son being returned, but she first wanted him to express what he wants:

“If possible, they can release him to come and stay with me but only when he agrees. Because maybe I can wish him to come stays with me but he may prefer to just visit and go back to the centre you see...” [Gugu 201-207].

Kobus understood that his children need to return to a better environment:

“All I want...is to make sure that my children go to an environment which is better than where they are coming from so that we can be together again under one roof and continue with our parenting and raise the children to be like normal human beings...” [Kobus 278-281].

The aim for most children removed from the care of their parents is to be reunified with their families if reunification is in the best interest of the child (D’Andrade 2014:51– 52). Furthermore, Section 7 of the Children’s Act states that social workers must do their work according to the principle of the best interest of the child.

Smith and Lidström(2020:43) state that social workers will conduct investigations and reunite the children with the families only if it is in the best interest of the child to do so. The authors further indicate that reunification between a child and his/her family is not

always in the best interest of that child if the family is not ready.

Some of the challenges that may prolong the process of reunification include the insufficient or absence of resources, and particularly the social workers' lacking time (Smith & Lidström 2020:43). Additionally, Pistor (2019:56) emphasises that "reunification and aftercare are at the level of service delivery where service beneficiaries regain control and self-reliance over their own lives for optimal social functioning in the least restrictive environment possible". A social worker's job in child and family welfare services is to help the family and community life reintegrate (DSD 2013).

The researcher's opinion is that even though parents may be distressed and expect to be reunited with their children after separation, it is not always possible, and it is critical that social workers investigate to ensure that parents or guardians are ready, and that reunification is in the best interests of the child/ren.

THEME 7: PARTICIPANTS' RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING REUNIFICATION SERVICES PROVIDED BY SOCIAL WORKERS

The last question addressed to the participants was focused on the recommendations they would make regarding reunification services provided by social workers. They were asked how reunification services could be improved or done differently.

In line with the ecosystem's perspective (Nicholas et al 2010:170) social workers should be able to observe parents to identify the effect of their environmental factors on their functioning. This will enable social workers to decide on appropriate intervention strategies. "The goal of the social worker should be not only be to learn about parents' strengths but also to understand something about the contexts which allow these strengths to be present – which, in turn, provides ideas for how intervention might create better contexts for these clients". (Bozic, Lawthom & Murray 2017:6).

From the participants' responses, three sub-themes emerged namely, removal of child/ren should be the last resort; the reunification process should be sped up; and social workers should provide training opportunities and work with parents.

Sub-theme 7.1: Removal of the child/ren should be the last resort.

Some participants' response to the final question was that, first and foremost, removing a child should be based on a thorough investigation and other options should be explored:

"I think when they come after being called concerning the children's matter they should investigate first and try to make a change first before they can decide to remove children to the centres..." [Sharon 203-213].

Agnes's response reflected how she felt it was not necessary to have removed the child and other options could have been used:

"...I am not saying the father did commit the crime but so far, he is the suspect, but now this thing of removing the child is affecting me as well. Why didn't they give him a restraining order [not] to see the children?" [Agnes 253-276].

Rejoice simply wanted her children returned:

"...They should have not removed the children. You know it's so painful to stay without your children they should bring back the children and even the children do feel pain when they stay away from their mother" [Rejoice 164-167].

Section 155(1) of the Children's Act stresses the importance of initial and continuous assessment to determine the need to remove a child. Furthermore, Sections 151 and 152(1) of the Act make provision that the same day a concern emerges, a designated social worker makes an initial assessment to see if the child should be removed immediately to temporary safe care with or without a court order. Section 155(2) of the Act specifies that within 48 hours of the removal, the court reviews the decision and there is an opportunity for the caregivers and children to challenge it.

After the review, a 90-day assessment period begins where the child either remains at home or in alternative care, depending on the initial assessment, until a decision is made by the court. During this period, a designated social worker has 90 days to investigate if the child needs care and protection and to give a report to the relevant provincial department of social development.

Based on the report, a children's court decides if the child needs care and protection. Section 158(1) of the Children's Act states that a children's court may issue an order placing a child in the care of a CYCC only if another option is not appropriate.

A court order is valid for not longer than two years at a time and after two years the order of placement is reviewed, and the possibility of reunification is considered. Before a court order regarding removal of a child is made, a designated social worker creates a 'permanency plan' for the child, which includes therapeutic and developmental programmes and is approved by the children's court (Children's Act, Section 159). The permanency plan includes reunification services to ensure reunification with the family or another suitable caregiver (Jamieson 2013).

The reunification process for a child in alternative care is assigned to a designated social worker (Children's Act, Section 157). Before and after reunification, the child and his/her family must be provided counselling by the designated social worker.

Before a child's reunification with the family or another suitable caregiver can be accomplished, the designated social worker responsible for the reunification process of the child must compile a report (Children's Act, Section 155). The report is based on the child's best interest and the reason is to fulfil the development goals of this child. The report must be compiled in collaboration with the caregiver, the head of the CYCC and the child, and must include a recommendation on whether reunification is a desirable option for the child.

Participants' response to the final question was that removing a child should be based on a thorough investigation and other options should be explored. From the storylines, it seems that parents do not understand the reason why the children were removed, and they feel the removal was not necessary. The researcher is convinced that awareness is essential, and social workers should teach parents about the processes when cases of neglect and child abuse are reported so that parents can understand.

that social workers only remove their children if it is in their best interest. However, the researcher is also of the opinion that social workers should sometimes consider

removing the perpetrator instead of removing the children to prevent children and parents going through these traumatic experiences of separation.

Sub-theme 7.2: The reunification process should be speeded up.

In their storylines, some participants reflected on the length of the entire reunification process and recommended that it should be sped up for the sake of both the children and the parents. Participants indicated their awareness of high caseloads of social workers:

“As they are working with children’s cases, what I can say is that a child is not like an adult you see. If they can at least try to, I don’t know if it is the pressure of their workload or what, but I think their process is delaying...” [Agnes 322-328].

Kobus echoed Agnes’ thoughts:

“...they must understand us and come up quickly with solutions to help us like for example our children, we are already their parents. (They were) not supposed to be staying here for such a long time. They were supposed to have sorted this problem for us so that we can be together and their mother be able to attend her treatment at hospital...” [Kobus 298-314].

Merry recommended the same, and said social workers should see their cases to completion:

“I am asking that they should make follow-ups of their work. She should not start with work and just decide to stop working all of a sudden” [Merry 198-199].

Reunification does not occur as often or as quickly as stakeholders might like, and child welfare organisations have been required to make "reasonable efforts" to help families reunify (D’Andrade & Nguyen 2014:51–52). A study was done focusing on the length of the reunification process, which is dynamic and varies drastically from case to case, sometimes taking up to several years before the child’s reunification with his/her family (Smith & Lidström 2020:27). The authors of the study further assert that reunification is often delayed due to court dates being postponed, high staff turnover, and high

caseloads of social workers from the field and social workers within CYCCs (Smith & Lidström 2020:34). Moreover, the field workers' working conditions are a challenge that could hinder a successful reunification (Sauls & Esau, 2015:221). In addition, parents' challenging circumstances, such as their substance abuse or mental health issues, as well as different types of abuse, such as physical, sexual and emotional abuse, often prevent children from returning from care (Fernandez et al 2019:97).

From the storylines and literature, it is clear that parents end up being frustrated by the long and often delayed reunification processes. This delay may be due to the postponement of court dates, high staff turnover, and social workers' working conditions and high caseloads, both for those social workers from the field and those within CYCCs. Sometimes cases may be delayed due to challenging circumstances with parents at home. The researcher is of the opinion that there should be remedial actions to aid in alleviating these challenges to enable children and parents to be reunified as soon as possible after separation.

Sub-theme 7.3: Social workers should provide training opportunities and work with parents.

People who have been exposed to disturbing circumstances may be viewed as victims; however, they have within themselves the strength to overcome those circumstances (Saleebey 2009:15). It is therefore important for social workers to support parents' strengths irrespective of the circumstances in which they may find themselves. Parents are more likely to participate in reunification when social workers support their strong point or strengths rather than focusing on their weak points.

Several participants recommended that there should be training and skills development opportunities provided to the parents as part of reunification services, and that the social workers should work together with the parents:

“...there should be a day where they can call us as parents whose children are removed from our care and educate us about parenting skills and from the ones at the centre, they should also combine us with our children and educate us”
[Merry 191- 194].

“I am advising the social workers [that they] should work hand in hand with us. They should respect us and we should also respect them” [Rejoice 170-171].

“I think they can make more of the events and not do just one or two events per annum but do more” [Yolanda 301-302]. “...we know they (social workers) can communicate but they should try harder because they are not the same. I am not mean it’s every one of them but they must try to have meetings of their own and talk about communication because some of them do not communicate with us...” [Yolanda 304-312].

In the study of the Voices of families and social workers in the family reunification system, parents told Bernal (2017:21) that many times, social workers would tell them that they (social workers) would enrol the parents in a specific class that was required by their reunification plan. However, often the social worker did not take initiative until the parents reminded them of their obligation. Furthermore, Balsells et al (2014:809) state that providing the biological families with specific training as part of the reunification process is key.

Additionally, Mateos et al (2018:575) stipulate that good practices in the promotion of positive parenting necessitate professionals having abilities and attitudes that allow them to form bonds with families as well as facilitating effective reunification. The author further states that these practices establish open and honest communication, commitment, respect, trust, and collaborative relationship with family (Mateos et al 2018:575).

The researcher’s opinion is that parents need social workers so they can empower them to grow and be independent when they are reunified with their children. It is vital that social workers support parents irrespective of the situations in which they may find themselves and allow them to be self-reliant. This will motivate the parents to participate in the reunification process.

3.5. CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 3 presented the study's research findings originating from the 15 transcribed, semi-structured interviews with parents whose children had been placed in CYCCs in the Tshwane municipal district of South Africa's Gauteng province. The study offered the biographical profile of participants, followed by a discussion of the seven themes, the 22 sub-themes and the seven categories that came out from the analysis, subsequently providing direct quotes from the interviews transcribed and putting them to literature control.

The first theme focused on the participants' descriptions of how and why their child/ren had been removed from their care. In the second theme, participants indicated when and why they visit their child/ren in the CYCC. The third theme covered the frequency of their child's/children's visits to their homes. This was followed by theme four, in which participants described their experiences of reunification services provided by the field social worker. The fifth theme presented participants' descriptions of their experiences of the reunification services provided by the CYCC social worker. This was followed by theme six, which dealt with participants' descriptions of their needs and expectations in terms of reunification services, while theme seven covered participants' recommendations for reunification services provided by social workers.

CHAPTER 4: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. INTRODUCTION

The goal of the study was to understand the experiences of parents whose children are placed in CYCCs regarding the reunification services offered by social workers in depth; and to suggest practice guidelines for social workers rendering reunification services. This chapter provides a synopsis of the previous chapters, the qualitative research methodology used and the findings. Based on the findings and the qualitative research process, conclusions and recommendations are also presented.

4.2. SUMMARY OF THE PREVIOUS CHAPTERS

The reader was first introduced to the study's background material, the study's problem description or statement, and the study's justification or the rationale in Chapter 1. The theoretical framework, research questions, research goals, and objectives were then presented, along with the planned research methods, essential concept clarification, and ethical considerations that were to be made during the investigation.

Chapter 2 focused on how the qualitative research methodology was used to achieve the study's goals and objectives. A qualitative approach enabled the researcher to engage with the participants on their experiences of reunification services during placement of their children in CYCCs. The application of the qualitative research approach, the research design, selection of the population and sampling, preparation of participants for application of data collection, methods of data collection, pilot testing, method of data analysis used and data verification applied, as well as the ethical considerations implemented, were also discussed.

Chapter 3 presented the research findings originating from 15 transcribed, semi-structured interviews with parents whose children had been placed in CYCCs in the Tshwane municipal district of South Africa's Gauteng province. There was a discussion of the seven themes, 22 sub-themes, and seven categories that emerged from the analysis after the biographical information on the participants. In this discussion, direct

quotes from the interview transcripts were used, followed by literature control. The participants' explanations of how and why their child or children had been taken from their care constituted the first theme. In the second theme, participants indicated when and why they visit their child/ren in the CYCC. The third theme covered the frequency of their child's/children's visits to their homes. This was followed by theme four, in which participants described their experiences of reunification services provided by the field social worker. The fifth theme presented participants' descriptions of their experiences of the reunification services provided by the CYCC social worker. This was followed by theme six, which dealt with participants' descriptions of their needs and expectations in terms of reunification services, while theme seven presented participants' recommendations for reunification services provided by social workers.

This chapter (Chapter 4) summarises the first three chapters of the research report and is followed by a summary of the conclusions reached based on the qualitative research process and major research findings. Finally, there are recommendations based on the major findings.

4.3. SUMMARIES, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS RELATING TO THE RESEARCH STUDY

The primary conclusions, recommendations for practice, and conclusions drawn from the qualitative research process are all included in this section.

4.3.1. Summary and conclusion relating to the research process.

The following are the research questions for the study:

- What are parents' experiences of reunification services during placement of their children in CYCCs?
- How would parents whose children are placed in CYCCs like to be supported by social workers in terms of reunification services?

The study's research goals were:

- To understand the experiences of parents whose children are placed in CYCCs regarding the reunification services offered by social workers in

depth; and

- To suggest practice guidelines for social workers rendering reunification services to parents whose children are placed in CYCCs.

To be successful in achieving the study's goals, the next research objectives were planned in Chapter 1:

- To explore and describe parents' experiences of reunification services during placement of their children in CYCCs;
- To explore and describe how parents whose children are placed in CYCCs like to be supported by social workers in terms of reunification services;
- To reach conclusions and make recommendations about these parents' experiences of reunification services and how they wish to be supported by social workers; and
- To develop practice guidelines for social workers rendering reunification services to parents whose children are placed in CYCCs.

To promote a thorough comprehension of parents' experiences of reunification services during placement of their children in CYCCs in the Tshwane municipal district of South Africa's Gauteng province, a qualitative study was carried out. Semi-structured interviews with the 15 participants were used to collect qualitative data. Tesch's eight steps were used in the analysis of data (cited in Creswell 2014:198). The data analysis resulted in seven themes, 22 sub-themes, and seven categories. Data validation was carried out in accordance with Guba's model (cited in Krefting 1991:215–221).

Because it allowed the researcher to interact with participants and acquire in-depth data, the qualitative research methodology used in this study was appropriate and beneficial. As a result, the study's objectives, which were to understand the experiences of parents whose children are placed in CYCCs regarding the reunification services offered by social workers in depth; and to suggest practice guidelines for social workers rendering reunification services to parents whose children are placed in CYCCs, were met.

Following are the conclusions made from the study's qualitative research process used

in this study:

- The study's non-probability sampling was found to be relevant as it was not time and cost effective to select every individual.
- Preparing the participants for data collection proved to be an essential step as the researcher was able to establish a rapport of trust with them. As a result, the participants were eager to participate in the study and sacrifice their time. They had no issue communicating their thoughts, feelings, and experiences.
- Instead of confining data collection to specific questions, the researcher was able to examine the phenomenon under examination due to the use of semi-structured interviews.
- Comparative descriptions of the participants' experiences with the provision of reunification services and preferred support were supplied by the themes, sub-themes, and categories that emerged from the data analysis.
- Guba's model of data verification (quoted in Krefting 1991:215-221) was helpful in preparing and boosting the trustworthiness of the findings.
- Throughout the investigation, the researcher's actions were guided by ethical principles. They provided the researcher with confidence that she could gain the required information without harming the participants in any way.

However, it is important to note that the research study was limited to a specific geographical area, which is Tshwane municipal district in South Africa's Gauteng province, and to parents' whose children were placed in two CYCCs. Hence, the findings cannot be generalised to other contexts and areas.

4.3.2. Summary and conclusions drawn from the research findings.

The researcher's findings are shown below, followed by a brief overview of the seven themes, 22 sub-themes, and seven categories that emerged from the qualitative data analysis.

THEME 1: PARTICIPANTS' DESCRIPTIONS OF HOW AND WHY THEIR CHILD/REN WERE REMOVED FROM THEIR CARE

Participants were cognisant of and understood the reasons why their children were

removed and placed in a CYCC. They described the reasons as alleged abused or neglect, that they were unable to care for the child/ren and that the child/ren manifested behavioural problems. Participants were unable to provide adequate care for their children for a variety of reasons, including physical illness or mental disorder that required medical care. This put the children at risk as they were exposed to the dangers of being abused or neglected. Participants also reported that children were removed from their parental care due to behavioural problems that the parents could not control. The children's continuous unruly and uncontrollable behaviour also affected their future.

Conclusion: Theme 1

It was clear that these children were neglected or abused and found themselves in circumstances from which children need protection. It was sensible to remove the children and place them in alternative care to prevent them from experiencing this mistreatment from the community and their families. It is also important to deal with children's behavioural problems to prevent these problems from affecting or ruining their future if not immediately attended to. Participants acknowledged their own responsibility in having their children removed from their care.

THEME 2: PARTICIPANTS' ACCOUNTS OF WHEN THEY VISITED THEIR CHILDREN IN THE CYCC AND WHY

Participants responded to questions on when and why they visited their children in the CYCC in two sub-themes, that is, the frequency of participants' visits to the child/ren; and participants' reasons for visiting the child/ren. Three participants conveyed that they had not visited their child/ren at all during the period the child/ren had been at the CYCC but mentioned that they contacted the child/ren telephonically to support and build their relationships and to work towards reunification. Five of the participants visited the child/ren at least once a month during the period they had been at the CYCC. Participants indicated the main reason for not visiting more regularly was a lack of money. Two of the participants visited the child/ren every week. It seems that these participants were really motivated to see their child/ren unless there were serious challenges, such as a lack of money or being out of the town.

In response to the question of why they visited their child/ren at the CYCC, participants said that they needed and missed their child/ren; and also loved them. In this case,

parents' needs of missing, loving and the wanting to be with their child/ren motivated them to go and visit the child/ren and the CYCC's.

Conclusion: Theme 2

It seems that seven participants wanted to be reunified with their child/ren as they made sure they visited them at least once a month despite financial challenges. It is understandable that parents sometimes do not manage to visit their child/ren due to a lack of finances, more especially when they are unemployed. These situations may affect their relationship with their child/ren; therefore, social workers should collaborate with the parents and help them find ways to deal with such challenges. When parents visit their child/ren regularly, they increase their chances of family reunification by staying attached to their child/ren. These parents were motivated to visit their child/ren because they needed and missed them, and they wanted to maintain their bond with their child/ren.

THEME 3: PARTICIPANTS' ACCOUNTS OF THE FREQUENCY OF THEIR CHILD/REN'S VISITS TO THEIR HOMES

Participants' accounts of how often their child/ren visited their homes were given in two categories, namely the child/ren had not visited and that they visited during school holidays. Section 168 (2) of the Children's Act states that if a child has been placed in alternative care under the supervision of a designated social worker, a leave of absence may only be granted with the approval of that social worker. Five of the parents stated that their child/ren had not visited them at their home. From the narratives, it was not clear whether the children were not allowed to visit because circumstances were not safe or whether the parents or social workers did not make sufficient effort to arrange visits.

Conclusion: Theme 3

Children will be able to grow well physically, emotionally and socially when they are regularly in contact with their parents. Therefore, it is essential that they are able to visit their parents during school holidays whenever it is safe and in their best interest. The social workers' decisions should always ensure the safety and the best interest of the child. However, sufficient effort should be made by parents and social workers to ensure regular visits.

THEME 4: PARTICIPANTS' DESCRIPTIONS OF THEIR EXPERIENCES OF REUNIFICATION SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE FIELD SOCIAL WORKER

The participants described their experiences of reunification services provided by the field social workers in three categories, namely, received no reunification services; negative experiences; and positive experiences.

The Children's Act, section 187, clearly states that a child in need of care and protection should be removed from the parental home with the view that reunification between the child and the biological parents is possible and is in the child's best interest. Potgieter and Hoosain (2018:438) suggest that the primary goal is therefore to stabilise the family circumstances and reunite the child with his/her biological parents. Additionally, Mateos et al., (2018:574) contend that professional support is necessary for reunification services for families who are receiving temporary protection to help families re-establish their family dynamics. Without this assistance, the circumstances that led to child abuse and neglect are likely to continue.

Most of the participants responded that they had received no reunification services from the field social worker and some complained that they had not even seen the field social worker after the removal of the child/ren. Hope and van Wyk, (2018:429– 432) indicate that family reunification services are hindered by certain challenges intrinsic to social work, such as high levels of stress, high case loads and a shortage of social workers in the country, which further contributes to high caseloads and a lack of resources. The authors state that as a result of the challenges within the various systems, current interventions are rushed, crisis oriented and of a 'drop-and-go' nature, resulting in insufficient emotional care directed towards the child and family.

A number of participants recounted that they had had contact with the field social worker but had experienced this contact negatively. Their responses can be presented in two categories, namely participants who felt they were treated unfairly or were pressured by the field social worker, and participants who reported no communication with field social workers, whom they experienced as unhelpful. The participants expressed their negative experiences in interacting with the social work systems, as they felt that the social workers were not treating them well, they were not understanding and they were

judgmental towards the participants, which made them feel helpless. Participants seemed to have a negative understanding of reunification services. Participants claimed that they had no communication with the field social workers as the social workers did not contact them, or even give them a detailed explanation of why their children were removed. They felt left out of the legal process and had unanswered questions.

A few participants reported positive experiences with the reunification services provided by their field social workers because the social workers worked in collaboration with them. As a result, the participants seemed to have benefited from the programmes and services provided by social workers.

Conclusion: Theme 4

It is clear that social workers may experience challenges that can hinder reunification services, and consequently it is vital for social workers and families to communicate regularly to update one another and to encourage reunification. Social workers should create a safe space for the parents so that they can feel their experiences are understood within a trusting relationship. Parents may then not feel unfairly treated and will not blame the social worker for removing their children. From the accounts of the participants, it was clear that social workers lacked communication skills and were experienced as unhelpful.

Open lines of communication between social workers and parents instead of a relationship based on power and imbalance will encourage parents to participate in reunification. When social workers work together with parents and children, parents will feel unconditionally respected and accepted by social workers. Parents can benefit from parental programmes and services provided by social workers to collaboratively ensure successful reunification. It seems that field social workers can benefit from training regarding parents' needs and expectations.

THEME 5: PARTICIPANTS' DESCRIPTIONS OF THEIR EXPERIENCES OF REUNIFICATION SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE CYCC SOCIAL WORKER

Participants described their experiences of reunification services provided by the CYCC social workers in four sub-themes, namely, the child/ren were well cared for by the CYCC; participants had no contact with CYCC social workers; participants had minimal contact

with CYCC social workers; and participants reported positive experiences with social workers from CYCCs.

Most of the participants were pleased with the care the children received from the CYCCs and observed the strengths of the system. There were participants who responded that they received no reunification services from the CYCC social worker. It seems that some participants were not clear on the identity and role of the field social workers on the one side and the CYCC social workers on the other. The responses from some participants reflected that they had minimal contact with the CYCC social workers. The social workers were either not available or sometimes resorted to telephonic contact with the participants. The participants were aware that there is a social worker allocated to them even though they had minimal contact with them.

However, a few individuals or participants spoke highly of the reunification services offered by the social workers at the CYCC. These participants mentioned how the social workers were good to participants as they provided support and motivation to them, resulting in successful parenting skills.

Conclusion: Theme 5

The participants were grateful as their children were well cared for by the CYCC. It is essential that the basic emotional, psychological, behavioural and educational needs of children in CYCCs are addressed, otherwise children may have increased emotional and developmental problems. Some parents seemed to experience social workers as being inaccessible and indifferent to them and feeling detached from them. It is crucial for social workers to be accessible and empathetic to parents as this will help the parents to see that the social workers are committed to assisting them in the reunification process. It is therefore vital that more social workers be employed so that there can be sufficient personnel (social workers) to render services. Should this problem continue, parents may be discouraged from participating in the reunification process, which may lead to unsuccessful reunification. Regular and meaningful input from the social workers at the CYCC will indicate a commitment to reunification, which will motivate parents to participate fully in the process. This may be productive if they can work hand in hand with field social workers. As in the case of field social workers, it seems that social workers at CYCCs can benefit from training that clarifies their role in working with field social workers

in reunifying families.

THEME 6: PARTICIPANTS' DESCRIPTIONS OF THEIR NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS IN TERMS OF REUNIFICATION SERVICES

Participants described their needs and expectations in terms of reunification services in four sub-themes focusing on the participants' need for and expectation of clear and regular communication with social workers; guidance and understanding from social workers; practical assistance and information from social workers; and to have their child/ren placed back in their care.

Services for family reunification are associated with therapeutic abilities like empathy, active listening, and feeling-reflection (Zimba, 2017). This suggests that interventions that focus on improving the client's family situation and talents as well as developing a trusting working relationship with the client, are more effective than those that are exclusively therapeutic in nature. Linked to their experience of inadequate or no communication with social workers, as explained under previous themes, most of the participants explained that what they needed and expected most was clear and regular communication. Participants wanted information on what is expected of them and what is happening in their children's lives, and they wanted social workers to know their backgrounds. Parents involved in Potgieter and Hoosain's (2018:442) study of reunification services indicated that there was a lack of communication between themselves, their child, the designated social worker and the residential staff. Parents felt that social workers were committed to their obligation to support them if they communicate with them regularly, ensure regular follow-ups through personal and telephonic contacts, meetings and home visits.

Participants expressed their need for and expectation of social workers to provide them with guidance on parenting skills and to understand that they might lack the necessary knowledge to be good carers. Many of them expressed a very definite need and expectation for practical assistance and information, and most of them expected assistance to secure adequate accommodation for their children. Participants also expressed that social workers need to assess the parents' situations and collaborate with them, and to ensure that they have or are connected to the resources and

information needed to complete their reunification plan. Many of the participants expressed that their main need was to have their children returned to their care. Two participants showed an understanding that children can only come back to a better environment and if they want to come home.

The aim for most children removed from the care of their parents is to be reunified with their families, if reunification offers the best interest of the child (D'Andrade 2014:51–52). Furthermore, Section 7 of the Children's Act states that social workers must do their work according to the principle of the best interest of the child. Smith and Lidström(2020:43) state that social workers will conduct investigations and, should it be in the best interest of the child to do so, reunify the child with their families. The authors further indicate that reunification between a child and his/her family is not always in the best interest of the child if the family is not ready. Difficulties like an absence of resources, and, particularly, social workers' lack of time may prolong the reunification process (Smith & Lidström 2020:43). Additionally, Pistor (2019:56) emphasises that reunification and aftercare are at the service delivery level, where service recipients regain authority and independence over their own lives for maximum social functioning in the least restrictive environment feasible.

Conclusion: Theme 6

It is essential for social workers to apply therapeutic skills, allow self-determination and collaborate with parents to promote successful reunification. Parents noted that they expected more communication between the different stakeholders. Separation of children from their parents is expected to be impermanent and therefore social workers should be in regular contact with parents as this will encourage parents to participate in reunification services, which will contribute to successful reunification. Social workers should provide guidance on parenting skills as participants might lack the necessary knowledge to be good carers.

The root cause for the child's removal should be addressed to facilitate successful reunification. It is crucial for social workers to collaborate with parents so they can be aware of their strengths and resources and can empower them through the facilitation of reunification. Although parents may expect to be reunified with their children after separation, it may not always be possible and it is vital that social workers investigate to

ensure that parents or guardians are ready for reunification and that it is in the best interest of the child/ren.

THEME 7: PARTICIPANTS' RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING REUNIFICATION SERVICES PROVIDED BY SOCIAL WORKERS

The participants' recommendations were given in three sub-themes, namely, removal of child/ren should be the last resort; the reunification process should be sped up; and social workers should provide training opportunities and work with parents.

Some participants stressed that, first and foremost, removing a child should be based on a thorough investigation and other options should be explored. It seemed that some parents did not understand the reason why the children were removed, and they felt the removal was not necessary. It is thus essential that social workers educate parents on the reason for the removal, the removal process and the reunification process. Participants also reflected on the length of the entire reunification process and recommended that it be sped up for the sake of the children and the parents. Participants indicated their awareness of the challenges experienced by social workers, including high caseloads, working conditions and staff turnover.

Balsells et al (2014:809) argue that providing the biological family with specific training as part of the reunification process is key. A number of participants recommended that training and skills development opportunities should be provided to the parents as part of reunification services and that social workers should work together with them to create a conducive environment for the children to return home. Where necessary, an interdisciplinary approach involving other professionals, such as psychologists and health practitioners, should be taken to prepare both parents and children for reunification.

Conclusion: Theme 7

Social workers should educate parents about the processes when cases of neglect and child abuse are reported so that parents can understand that social workers only remove their child/ren if it is in the best interest of the child/ren. Social workers should sometimes consider removing the perpetrator instead of removing the child/ren to prevent children

and parents having to go through these traumatic experiences of separation. Parents end up being frustrated by the long and often delayed reunification process. This delay may be due to the postponement of court dates, high staff turnover, social workers' working conditions, and the high caseloads of both social workers from the field and those within CYCCs.

Sometimes cases may be delayed due to the challenging circumstances parents face at home. There should be remedial actions to aid in alleviating these challenges and to enable children and parents to be reunified as soon as possible after separation. It is clear that parents need social workers to empower them so that they can grow and be independent when they are reunified with their children. It is vital that social workers support parents, irrespective of the situations in which they may find themselves and allow them to be self-reliant. This will motivate them to participate in the reunification process.

4.4. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The researcher conducted a qualitative study focusing on the parents' experiences of reunification services during placement of their children in CYCCs. The study was limited because the researcher drew a sample from parents whose children had been placed at these centres, due to time and money limitations, the study was unable to include everyone in the population.

The study was also limited to a specific geographical area, namely, the Tshwane municipal district in South Africa's Gauteng province, and as a result, the results or findings cannot be applied to other situations or regions.

The participants seemed to struggle to express themselves due to language barriers. The researcher addressed this limitation by interviewing the participants in their home languages, namely Zulu and Tswana. If the researcher had been aware of the participants' language barriers beforehand, she could have prepared the participants' information letters in Zulu and Tswana.

The same topic could be explored further in future as the study was exploratory in character.

4.5. RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON THE RESEARCH STUDY

Based on the research findings and research process, the researcher makes the following recommendations regarding reunification services, practice guidelines for social workers and future research.

4.5.1. Recommendations regarding reunification services

- The DSD, in partnership with NGOs, should regularly host workshops for social workers on offering services for reunification. This kind of training are supposed to provide clarity on the provision of reunification services as required by the Children's Act and should receive approval from the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP) in the form of continuing professional development points.
- Although this was not mentioned by the participants, reunification services are influenced by other stakeholders, such as the psychologists, the police officers, the medical health workers and the magistrates. It would be beneficial if these stakeholders are made aware of the role, they can play with regards to reunification services.
- The DSD and NGOs should provide adequate funding, organisational resources, human resources and supervision for the effective implementation of reunification services programmes. They should also provide clear information and training on the roles and responsibilities of the field and CYCC social workers in relation to reunification of parents and children in CYCCs.
- The DSD and NGOs should allocate social workers delivering reunification programmes manageable caseloads. This will allow them to focus on fewer cases and offer thorough services that might have beneficial results.
- To ascertain the degree of success and the efficacy of the reunification services offered to individuals, families, organisations, and communities, the DSD and NGOs should create and implement an efficient monitoring and evaluation tool.
- When offering reunification services, the researcher advises social workers to include affected children and families in formulating goals and creating

the intervention plan.

- Social workers might explore employing relaxation techniques through team building and expanding their repertoire of coping mechanisms to combat burnout.

4.5.2. Practice guidelines for social workers

- Social workers should educate parents about the processes followed when cases of neglect and child abuse are reported so that parents can understand that social workers only remove their child/ren if it is in the best interest of the child/ren. Awareness programmes are thus crucial.
- Social workers should sometimes consider removing the perpetrator instead of removing the children to prevent children and parents having to go through these traumatic experiences of separation.
- During reunification services, social workers' decisions relating to removal, visits or reunification should always ensure the safety and the best interest of the child/ren. Social workers should thus investigate to ensure that the parents or guardians and the child/ren are ready for reunification. Social workers should, however, work to reunify families as soon as possible after removal.
- Social workers should collaborate with parents and help them find ways to deal with challenges during reunification services. These include practical challenges such as accommodation and transport, as well as relationship difficulties.
- Social workers should regularly and clearly communicate with families as this will encourage reunification. Parents want to know where their children are staying, what they do on a weekly basis and why they cannot come to visit.
- Social workers should create a safe space for their clients so that they can feel their experiences are understood and not feel unfairly treated. Parents who do not feel judged will not blame the social worker for removing their children.
- Social workers need to work together with parents and children and apply therapeutic skills, allowing for self-determination. This will make parents feel

unconditionally respected and accepted by social workers. Parental programmes are essential, and when social workers work collaboratively with parents, the parents will benefit from the programmes and services provided to ensure successful reunification.

- Regular and meaningful input from the social workers at the CYCC will indicate a commitment to reunification that will motivate parents to participate fully in the process. Social workers at the CYCCs should work hand in hand with field social workers.
- Social workers should provide guidance and training on parenting skills as participants might lack the necessary knowledge to be good carers. Should this materialise, the concerns that were the root causes for the child's removal can be addressed, which will contribute to successful reunification. Parents should realise the importance of maintaining a bond with their children.
- Social workers should collaborate with parents and use the strength-based perspective to create awareness of their strengths and resources to empower them through the facilitation of reunification. The ten points of strengths-based counselling recommended by Smith (2006:38-48) in Chapter 1 could be useful in this regard.
- Social workers should support parents irrespective of the situations they may find themselves in and allow them to be self-reliant. This will motivate them to participate during the reunification process.
- Social workers should deal with children's behavioural problems by rendering individual and group work sessions, and by referring them to relevant stakeholders such as psychologists and secure centres for further intervention. Parents should also be taught how to deal with their child's/children's behavioural problems.

4.5.3. Recommendations for further research

- Research should also be conducted in other geographical areas to determine good practices in providing family reunification services.
- Future research should focus on the development of an effective monitoring and evaluation tool to determine the level of success and the effectiveness

of reunification services provided to individuals, families, groups and communities.

4.6. CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter began with an introduction to the study, followed by summaries of the other chapters, an overall summary of the study, and the research study's conclusions and recommendations. This included the research process and findings, the limitations of the study, and recommendations for practice, practice guidelines for social workers and future research.

This research study provided parents with children in CYCCs with a voice to share their experiences of the reunification services they received and the support they expect from social workers. The researcher is of the opinion that the suggestions and recommendations, which are based on the study's findings, can contribute to parents and children being successfully reunited within a shorter period of time.

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ADDENDUM A: REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION OF TSHWANE MUNICIPALITY

To whom it may concern

Re: Request for participation in research within the Tshwane municipality

My name is Lorraine Mmapelo Sethole and I am currently registered for a Master of Social Work degree at the University of South Africa (Unisa), student number 33844585. As part of my studies, I am required to conduct research and write a research report. In that regard, I am humbly requesting that you allow me to do my research and to be in contact with my research participants in Tshwane municipality. The research title is: **Parents' experiences of reunification services during placement of their children in child and youth care centres: Practice guidelines for social workers**. The research study will be qualitative in nature and will employ the use of interviews as a data collection method. The research will be conducted in Tshwane and will cover the child and youth care centres that are easy reachable.

The goals of the study are:

- To understand the experiences of parents whose children are placed in CYCCs regarding the reunification services offered by social workers in depth; and
- To suggest practice guidelines for social workers rendering reunification services to parents whose children are placed in CYCCs.

The research study will only be conducted following the approval of the Unisa Research and Ethics committee which follows strict ethical guidelines and ensures that research participants are protected from harm.

Should you be willing to assist me in this regard, please accept my request in a formal letter as I have to prove that I have engaged you in this regard. If you have any further

enquiries, please contact me on the contact details given below. Your assistance will be greatly appreciated.

Kind regards

.....
Lorraine Mmapelo Sethole
Master of Social Work Student
0767525376
mmapelosehole@gmail.com
Mmapelo.Sethole@gauteng.gov.za

ADDENDUM B: REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION AT CHILD AND YOUTHCARE CENTRE (CYCC)

TO: The Manager

Re: Request for participation in research within your CYCC

My name is Lorraine Mmapelo Sethole and I am currently registered for a Master of Social Work degree at the University of South Africa (Unisa), student number 33844585. As part of my studies, I am required to conduct research and write a research report. In that regard, I am humbly requesting permission to do my research and to be in contact with the research participants from your child and youth care centre (CYCC). The research title is: **Parents' experiences of reunification services during placement of their children in child and youth care centres: Practice guidelines for social workers**. The research study will be qualitative in nature and will employ the use of interviews as a data collection method. The research will be conducted in Tshwane and will cover the child and youth care centres that are easy reachable.

The goals of the study are:

- To understand the experiences of parents whose children are placed in CYCCs regarding the reunification services offered by social workers in depth; and
- To suggest practice guidelines for social workers rendering reunification services to parents whose children are placed in CYCCs.

The research study will only be conducted following the approval of the Unisa Research and Ethics committee which follows strict ethical guidelines and ensures that research participants are protected from harm.

Should you be willing to assist me in this regard, please accept my request in a formal letter as I have to prove that I have engaged you in this regard. If you have any further enquiries, please contact me on the contact details given below. Your assistance will be greatly appreciated.

Kind regards

.....
Lorraine Mmapelo Sethole
Master of Social Work Student
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ADDENDUM C: INFORMATION AND INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT: PARENTS' EXPERIENCES OF REUNIFICATION SERVICES DURING PLACEMENT OF THEIR CHILDREN IN CHILD AND YOUTH CARE CENTRES: PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR SOCIAL WORKERS

REFERENCE NUMBER: 33844585

INVESTIGATOR/RESEARCHER: LM SETHOLE

ADDRESS: 1539 DADELPALM STREET, CHANTELE, EXTENSION 16, 0182

CONTACT TELEPHONE NUMBER: 0767525376

DECLARATION BY OR ON BEHALF OF THE PARTICIPANT:

I, THE UNDERSIGNED, (name) _____

[ID No: _____], the participant or in my capacity as

_____ of the participant [ID

No _____], of

_____ (address).

A. HEREBY CONFIRM AS FOLLOWS:

1. I/the participant was invited to participate in the above research project which is being undertaken by Lorraine Mmapelo Sethole of the Department of Social Work in the School of Social Science and Humanities at the University of South Africa.

2. The following aspects have been explained to me/the participant:

2.1. Aim: The investigator(s)/researcher(s) is/are studying:

- The experiences of parents whose children are placed at the child and youth care centres regarding the reunification services, and

- The suggested content of practice guidelines for social workers rendering these reunification services.

2.2. I understand that I have been selected as a part of this research study due to my knowledge and experience regarding the topic being researched. I am also cognisant of the importance of this research study and will do my best to furnish the researcher with accurate and useful information.

3. Risks: I understand that the researcher has taken great care in ensuring that her research study is not harmful to my being and that the researcher will ensure that I receive counselling/debriefing should it be necessary. With this knowledge, I am confident that my participation will not result in any increased risk and that there are plans in place to mitigate any potential risks that may arise.

4. Possible benefits: As a result of my participation in this study, there are no financial benefits that will accrue to me and that my participation is voluntary and is out of my interest in improving my profession.

5. Confidentiality: My identity will not be revealed in any discussion, description or scientific publications by the investigators/researchers.

6. Initial access to findings: Any new information/benefit that develops during the course of the study will be shared with me.

7. Voluntary participation/refusal/discontinuation: My participation is voluntary. My decision whether or not to participate will in no way affect me now or in the future.

The information above was explained to me/the participant by _____
_____ in Afrikaans/English/Sotho/Xhosa/Zulu/other
_____ (indicate other language) and I am in command of this
language/it was translated to me satisfactorily by_____.

I was given the opportunity to ask questions and all these questions were answered satisfactorily.

8. No pressure was exerted on me to consent to participate and I understand that I may withdraw at any stage from the study without any penalty.

9. Participation in this study will not result in any additional cost to me.

I HEREBY CONSENT VOLUNTARILY TO PARTICIPATE IN THE ABOVE PROJECT.

Signed/confirmed at _____ on 20 _____

—

Signature or right thumbprint of participant _____

Signature of witness _____

ADDENDUM D: ETHICAL CONSENT FORM

Dear colleagues,

I, Lorraine Mmapelo Sethole, I am a social worker employed by the Department of Social Development, statutory section in the Tshwane region, and am also a part-time Master's student in the Department of Social Work at the University of South Africa (Unisa). In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Master's degree, I have to undertake a research project and have consequently decided to focus on the following research topic:

Parents' experiences of reunification services during placement of their children in child and youth care centres: practice guidelines for social workers. In view of the fact that due to an increasing number of children in need of care and protection in South Africa, the majority of these children are removed from the care of their parents and placed at the child and youth care centres for proper care and protection. Little is known about the reunification services for parents whose children are in these centres. Research in this regard will enable the researcher to compile practice guidelines for social workers to facilitate more effective reunification services. I therefore request you to participate in the study. For you to decide whether or not to participate in this research study, I will furnish you with information that will help you to understand the study (i.e. what the aims of the study are and why there is a need for this particular study). Furthermore, you will be informed about what your involvement in this study will entail (i.e. what you will be asked/or what you will be requested to do during the study, the risks and benefits involved by participating in this research project, and your rights as a participant in this study).

I have decided to conduct a research project on this topic resulting from my observation that there is very little research that has been conducted regarding parents' experiences of reunification services during placement of their children in child and youth care centres. There is also a lack of practice guidelines facilitating this service. With this in mind, the following aim is formulated:

The researcher intends to come up with practical guidelines for social workers on how to provide effective reunification services for parents and children placed at the child and youth care centres. Furthermore, the researcher believes that these guidelines will enable social workers to provide effective reunification services aimed at enhancing the relationship between parents and children placed at the child and youth care centres.

The topical questions for the research study are as follows:

- What are parents' experiences of reunification services during placement of their children in CYCCs?
- How would parents whose children are placed in CYCCs like to be supported by social workers in terms of reunification services?

Should you agree to participate, you would be requested to participate in a face-to-face interview that will be conducted at your home or place of employment and at your convenience. It is estimated that the interview(s) will last approximately 1 hour.

With your permission, the interview will be audio-taped. The recorded interviews will be transcribed word-for-word. Your responses in the interview (both the taped and transcribed versions) will be kept strictly confidential. The audiotape will be coded to protect any identifying information. The tapes will be stored in a locked office in the safe at the place of residence of the researcher and only I will have access to them. The transcripts (without any identifying information) will be made available to my research supervisor, a translator (if they need to be translated into English), and an independent coder with the sole purpose of assisting and guiding me with this research undertaking.

My research supervisor and the independent coder will each sign an undertaking to treat the information shared by you in a confidential manner. The independent coder is someone who is well versed and experienced in analysing information collected by means of interviews and is appointed to analyse the transcripts of the interviews independently of the researcher to ensure that the researcher will report the participants' accounts of what has been researched. The audiotapes and the

transcripts of the interviews will be destroyed upon the completion of the study. Identifying information will be deleted or disguised in any subsequent publication and presentation of the research findings.

Please note that participation in the research is completely voluntary. You are not obliged to take part in the research. Your decision to participate, or not to participate, will not affect you in any way now or in the future and you will incur no penalty and/or loss to which you may otherwise be entitled. Should you agree to participate and sign the information and informed consent document herewith, as proof of your willingness to participate, please note that you are not signing your rights away.

If you agree to take part, you have the right to change your mind at any time during the study. You are free to withdraw this consent and discontinue participation without any loss of benefits. However, if you do withdraw from the study, you would be requested to grant me an opportunity to engage in informal discussion with you so that the research partnership that was established can be terminated in an orderly manner. As the researcher, I also have the right to dismiss you from the study without regard to your consent if you fail to follow the instructions or if the information you have to divulge is emotionally sensitive and upsets you to such an extent that it hinders you from functioning physically and emotionally in a proper manner. Furthermore, if participating in the study at any time jeopardises your safety in any way, you will be dismissed for your own safety. Should I conclude that the information you have shared left you feeling emotionally upset, or perturbed, I am obliged to refer you to a counsellor for debriefing or counselling (should you agree). You have the right to ask questions concerning the study at any time. Should you have any questions or concerns about the study, contact me, Ms Lorraine Mmapelo Sethole (the researcher), on this number: 0767525376.

Please note that this study can only be conducted following approval by the Research and Ethics Committee of the Department of Social Work, Unisa. Without the approval of this committee, the study cannot be conducted. Should you have any questions and queries not sufficiently addressed by me as the researcher, you are more than welcome to contact the Chairperson of the Research and Ethics Committee of the

Department of Social Work at Unisa. His contact details are as follows: Prof AH (Nicky) Alpaslan, telephone number: 012 429 6739, or email alpasah@unisa.ac.za

If, after you have consulted the researcher and the Research and Ethics Committee in the Department of Social Work at Unisa, their answers have not satisfied you, you may direct your questions/concerns/queries to the Chairperson, Human Ethics Committee, College of Human Science, PO Box 392, Unisa, 0003. Based upon all the information provided to you above, and being aware of your rights, you are asked to give your written consent should you want to participate in this research study by signing and dating the information and consent form provided herewith and initialling each section to indicate that you understand and agree to the conditions. Thank you for your participation.

Kind regards

.....

Ms Lorraine Mmapelo Sethole
Researcher

Contact details: 076 7525 376

Email: mmapelosehole@gmail.com/ Mmapelo.Sethole@gauteng.gov.za

ADDENDUM E: CONSENT FORM REQUESTING PERMISSION TO PUBLISH AUDIOTAPES AND VERBATIM TRANSCRIPTS OF AUDIOTAPE RECORDINGS

As part of this project, I will make use of, audio recording of you. I would like you to indicate (with ticks in the appropriate blocks next to each statement below) what uses of these records you are willing to consent to. This is completely up to you. I will use the records only in ways that you agree to. In any of these records, names will not be identified.

1. The records can be studied by the research team and quotations from the transcripts made of the recordings can be used in the research report.
2. The records (i.e. quotations from the transcripts made of the recordings) can be used for scientific publications and/or meetings.
3. The written transcripts can be used by other researchers.
4. The records (i.e. quotations from the transcripts made of the recordings) can be used in public presentations to non-scientific groups.
5. The records can be used on television or radio.

Signature of participant

ADDENDUM F: STATEMENTS AND DECLARATIONS STATEMENT BY OR ON BEHALF OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

I, Lorraine Mmapelo Sethole, declare that I have explained the information given in this document to _____(name of participant) and/or his/her representative _____(name of representative); he/she was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions; this conversation was conducted in Afrikaans/English/Sotho/Xhosa/Zulu/other _____(indicate other language) and no translator was used/this conversation was translated into _____ (language) by _____(name).

Signed at _____ on
_____ 20 _____

Signature of investigator/representative _____

Signature of witness _____

ADDENDUM G: IMPORTANT MESSAGE TO PARTICIPANT/REPRESENTATIVE OF PARTICIPANT:

Dear Participant/Representative of participant

Thank you for your/the participant's participation in this study. Should at any time during the study an emergency arise as a result of the research, or you require any further information with regard to the study, kindly contact Lorraine Mmapelo Sethole at telephone number 0767525376.

ADDENDUM H: ACCEPTANCE LETTER FROM DEBRIEFER

59

ADDENDUM H: ACCEPTANCE LETTER FROM DEBRIEFER

ENQ: MAPULA SEKGODISO

TEL : (012) 701 9482

mmapula.Sekgodiso@gauteng.gov.za

Dear Ms Lorraine Mmapelo Sethole

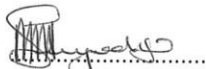
Re: REQUEST FOR PARTICIPANTS' DEBRIEFING SERVICES

This letter serves as a confirmation that I Mapula Sekgodiso with SACSSP registration no: 10-25247 have accepted your requisition regarding the debriefing services. I am willing to support your research participants with such services without any charge.

You are requested to remind me at least a week before when data collection begins so that one can be ready to receive your participants when the need arise.

I wish you a great success with your studies.

Kind regards



Mapula Sekgodiso

Date: 2017.09.08

Contact details:

Email: Mmapula.Sekgodiso@gauteng.gov.za

Office line: 012-701 9482

Cell: 0634958539/ 0725253308

ADDENDUM I: APPLICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT



Enquiries: Dr. Sello Mokoena
Tel: (011) 3557949
File no.: 2/9/91

MS LORRAINE MMAPELO SETHOLE

Dear Ms Lorraine Mmapelo Sethole

RE: APPLICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE GAUTENG DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Thank you for your application to conduct research within the Gauteng Department of Social Development.

Your application on the research on "Parents' Experiences of Re-Unification Services During Placement of their Children in Child and Youth Care Centres: Practice Guidelines for Social Workers" has been considered and approved for support by the Department as it was found to be beneficial to the Department's vision and mission. The approval is subject to the Department's terms and conditions as endorsed on the 20th of April 2018. In order for the department to learn and draw from the findings and recommendations of your study, please note that you are requested to provide the department with a copy of your dissertation/thesis once your study has been completed.

May I take this opportunity to wish you well on the journey you are about to embark on.

We look forward to a value adding research and a fruitful co-operation.

With thanks

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A Hartmann".

Ms A HARTMANN
Deputy Director General: Support Services
Date: 26 April 2018