

**SOCIAL WORKERS' EXPERIENCES, CHALLENGES, AND SOLUTIONS IN  
PREVENTING THE RECURRENCE OF CHILDREN LIVING ON AND OFF THE  
STREETS IN THE CITY OF TSHWANE, PRETORIA**

**BY**

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## DECLARATION

I, Niyiguha Vestine Ntakirutimana, with the student number 47115246, hereby declare that unless indicated to the contrary in the text, the dissertation titled “Social Worker’s Experiences, Challenges, and Solutions in Preventing the Recurrence of Children Living on and Off the Streets in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria” is my own original work. All the resources used have been referenced and acknowledged.

Signature:

Date: 17 May 2024

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'N.V. Ntakirutimana', written over a horizontal line.

N.V. Ntakirutimana

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Editorial work of the dissertation was coordinated and done by Ms Lindi de Beer. Given that English is my third language, a professional editor was needed to ensure that the final report meets the academic standard of quality.

Finally, the UNISA Post Graduate Student Funding scheme has made it possible to address finances involved in this entire study. A project of this calibre is so costly that students without alternative funding sources find themselves in a compromising situation, resulting in them abandoning the race.

As my end remark, glory be to God Almighty for His provision.

## ABSTRACT

Emerging from this study in social development planning and execution of social cluster services, a critical segment representing children living on and off the streets does not catch the eye of the role players, such as the Department of Social Development, especially those in places of authority with a level of influence to respond appropriately to the situation. The researcher identified a gap, believing that it has a bearing on CYCC social workers who are on the frontline in efforts to administer professional services to prevent the problem from recurring. This research was conducted in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria, Gauteng Province. The researcher has applied contextual qualitative research methodology and approaches in exploring social workers' experiences, challenges, and solutions in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets. As an important component of the research methodology, sampling methods used include probability and non-probability to ensure accuracy in selecting the targeted participants given the study population. Subsequently, the data collection methods used is the semi-structured one-to-one interviews with questions which helped gain more concise and detailed picture of each participant's beliefs about the theme of the study. As for the data analysis and interpretation, the process followed includes arrangement of interview notes through transcription to allow critical review and coding process. Recurring themes were identified and to facilitate easy analysis, subthemes, categories and subcategories were considered. To ascertain reliability and credibility, data verification was done by arranging debriefing sessions with the participants which allowed the researcher to verify the information given in the interviews. The researcher also gave the final draft of her research to a CYCC social worker colleague to read the work for the feedback. To adhere to research ethical standard, before interviews, each participant was given a consent form which was explained before the signing. Examples drawn from the findings indicate that with constant and close collaboration between the Department of Social Development and designated social workers, the police, the Children's Court, CYCC social workers, and the South African Council for Social Service Professions, they can leverage each other's strengths and capacities to create an ecosystem that will fast track an agenda of improved prevention service delivery to children living on and off the streets.

**Key words:** Children on and off the streets, social workers' challenges, experiences, solutions, prevention services.

### [TS'ELISO]<sup>1</sup>

Ho tsoa thutong ena, moralong oa ntlafatso ea sechaba le ts'ebetsong ea lits'ebeletso tsa lihlopha tsa sechaba, karolo ea bohlokoa e emelang bana ba phelang le ho tloha literateng ha e khahle mahlo a libapali haholo-holo ba nang le matla a phahameng a nang le tšusumetso e phahameng ea ho sheba boemo ka tsela e fapaneng. Lipatlisiso li bonts'itse lekhalo le setseng ka morao ho lumela hore le na le ts'ebetso ho basebeletsi ba boiketlo ba sechaba ba CYCC ba leng ka pele boitekong ba bona ba ho tsamaisa litšebeletso tsa litsebi ho thibela bothata hore bo se ke ba khutla. Patlisiso ena e entsoe Tshwane, Pretoria, Profinseng ea Gauteng. Mofuputsi o sebelisitse mokhoa oa ho etsa lipatlisiso tsa boemo bo botle le mekhoha ea ho hlahloba liphihlelo tsa basebeletsi ba sechaba, liphephetso le tharollo ea ho thibela ho pheta-pheta ha bana ba lulang literateng le ho tsoa. Mehlala e tsoang liphuputsong e bontša hore tšebelisoano-'moho pakeng tsa DSD le basebeletsi ba sechaba ba khethiloeng, mapolesa, lekhottla la bana, basebeletsi ba sechaba ba CYCC le SACSSP e ka thusa ho matlafatsa matla le bokhoni ba e mong ho theha tikoloho e tla potlakisa morero oa ntlafatso ea thibelo. Phano ea litšebeletso ho bana ba lulang literateng le kantle ho tsona.

---

<sup>1</sup> Sesotho -Goole translate

## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>ABBREVIATION</b>	<b>MEANING</b>
<b>CBD</b>	Central Business District
<b>CMR</b>	Caring, Mentoring and Restoring
<b>COVID-19</b>	Coronavirus disease 2019
<b>CPS</b>	Child Protection Services
<b>CYCCs</b>	Child and Youth Care Centres
<b>DSD</b>	Department of Social Development
<b>HIV</b>	Human immunodeficiency virus
<b>AIDS</b>	Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
<b>HSRC</b>	Human Sciences Research Council
<b>IDP</b>	Individual development plan
<b>IFSW</b>	International Federation of Social Workers
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organisation
<b>NPO</b>	Non-profit organisation
<b>SACSSP</b>	South African Council for Social Service Professions
<b>SAVF</b>	Suid-Afrikaanse Vrouefederasie
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UNISA</b>	University of South Africa
<b>USA</b>	United States of America

# **CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL INTRODUCTION, PROBLEM FORMULATION, AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY**

## **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

The section on the background to the study introduces the reader to the important sub-headings through which the broader overview of the dissertation was constructed. These sub-headings are risk factors leading to children living on and off the streets, upscaling prevention services, and reintegration services. The other main headings of this chapter include the problem statement; rationale for the study; theoretical framework; research question, goal, and objectives; research methodology; ethical considerations; clarification of key concepts arising from the study; structure of the study; dissemination of the research results; and chapter synthesis.

The section on the theoretical framework will address the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem, all of which help to foster a conducive environment for social workers to render prevention services to children living on and off the streets recurrently. Under research methodology, the researcher discusses the research approach, design, and methods; the research population; the sample and sampling methods; data collection and methods of data collection; the role of the researcher; piloting; data analysis, organisation, review, and coding system; identification of recurring themes; and data verification.

The discussion now moves to the background of the study.

## **1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

As indicated, “social workers’ experiences, challenges, and solutions in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria” was the leading theme. The researcher worked under the basic assumption that the problem was a growing concern globally which affects CYCC social workers in their profession, more specifically when seeking to implement integrated prevention

services. Having then identified the areas of focus in the study, it is crucial to engage research aiming to show the extent of children living on and off the streets globally as the researcher's starting point toward developing a bigger picture of the problem the theme seeks to address.

Chamie (2017:2) reveals that about 150 million of the world's total population are people in streets. That figure is quoted in the Women's UN Report Network (2023) with comments that the estimates are not a true reflection as "no one knows the exact number because they [children living on and off the streets] are often unknown to social care and government organisations."

With the above observations, the researcher quotes Babahanoğlu (2020:129) recording that there 100 million children living and working in the streets worldwide. To be specific, United Nations (UN) experts have recently estimated that 7 200 children aged between five and 17 are living in Dhaka, India, and in the country's eight divisions, fearing "...the number of children living on the streets in Bangladesh could be in the millions" (United Nations Children's Fund 2023).

Focussing on Africa the researcher also refers to Ongowo, Ngetich, and Murenga, (2021:1) estimating that 16 million of children live on streets, a figure which combines those children living on and off streets.

Given the continents' estimates, the researcher is also motivated to explore the South African situation where it is reported that about 250,000 children including adolescents live on streets (Hills, Meyer-Weitz and Asante 2016:1). The researcher however notices that, the above estimates are by comparison bigger than 100,000 profiled in Tshwane Alliance for Street Children (Maepa 2021:1). An advantage this report, is that it clarifies that street children in South Africa include those under 18 years old living on and off streets without any form of parental or adult care. Among many exposures to these children, use of dangerous drugs, violence, aggression, rape and sexually transmitted diseases including HIV and AIDS and crime are included.

From here in the inner city of Tshwane, the researcher's central focus, The Tshwane reporting on the Homeless Summit that took place in the Pretoria Central Business



District (CBD) in 2015, estimated 6 244 homeless people on the streets. However, the report did not offer an idea of how many of these individuals are children living on and off the streets. It is only Ntakirutimana (2015:32) who attempted to profile children's shelters, stating that seven out of 13 temporary shelters host children who are presumably living on and off the streets.

Out of all the above reports, a common denominator is that they are speculative, which then necessitates further investigations to develop a realistic picture of the problem and trends. Nonetheless, after deliberations the available research and estimating numbers, the researcher believes that the absence of reliable statistics constitutes a serious impediment to restructuring prevention services. She also believes that if the magnitude of the phenomenon of children living on and off the streets, which steals the dignity and future of children, is not appropriately profiled, child vulnerability in society will reach even higher levels. This will also result in the engaged key service providers, such as the social workers who are the focus of this study, will underachieve in their efforts to render prevention care services. Further implications were reviewed in Advocacy Aid (2019:1) and Martin (2016:180), specifically referring to the South African context. It was confirmed that children are believed to be among not only the most vulnerable people, but also the fastest growing group among the homeless population. Thus, the researcher believes that a set of the legal documents, including the Children's Act 38 of 2005 updated 2023 (Social Development Department 2023:119), acknowledges the plight of vulnerable children, including those who live on and off the streets. The researcher further refers to Kilkelly and Liefwaard (2019:522) who analyse the bill of rights with reference to the need for family care, basic nutrition, shelter, healthcare, education, and protection from maltreatment, as well as protection from abuse, the absence of which portrays child deprivation and may contribute to children living on and off the streets.

Moving on from the local context, the UN and its Division for Inclusive Social Development does not specifically use the language of children living on and off the streets. However, the researcher has realised that the issues of historical disadvantages, migration patterns, unemployment and low wages, social exclusion and cultural rights, loss of parents or the household's sole breadwinner, home

desertion, lack of civic identification documents, and natural disasters should be regarded as major causal factors (Obioha 2019:16).

The American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare (Henwood et al 2015:6) also does not specifically use the language of children living on and off the streets, but it is believed they are referring to them when expressing an alarm that in the United States of America (USA) the number of children living and working on the streets was growing more rapidly as compared to adults. “Children... are more likely than their stably housed peers to experience physical, mental, and behavioural problems, and to have experienced various psychosocial risks including exposure to violence and lack of access to medical care” (Henwood, et al 2015:6).

Further exploring the bigger picture of children living on and off the streets, Myburgh, Moolla and Poggenpoel (2015:1) introduce “a visible manifestation of a fragmented socioeconomic and political society”. It is profiled that children living on and off the streets have been subjected to several vices: they are “threatened, exploited and exposed to physical, sexual and emotional abuse on a daily basis by the community, the authorities and other street dwellers” (Myburgh et al 2015:1).

Through the lens of the above specific reports, the researcher established the adversities children face at “home” and on the “streets”. She therefore believes that when Maepa (2021:2) mentions challenges and difficulties experienced by children living on and streets, he is also largely articulating the experiences and challenges service providers, including social workers, face in rendering prevention services to distressed children living on and off the streets in different environments. These environments refer to children living in families, on the streets, in Child and Youth Care Centres (CYCCs), exiting from temporary residential care, and going back to the streets.

This circle made the researcher asking herself a general question whether in reality the social welfare system exist to address human phenomenon of homelessness. Thus, her interest arose from considering unsolved challenges that are demanding for social workers who are working with children living on and off-street including stress, burnout and job dissatisfaction caused by encountering client’s suffering and the inability to change the situation (Wirth, Mette, Prill, Harth and Nienhaus

2019:258). It is from this understanding, she opted to delve into social workers' experiences, challenges, and linked solutions in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets. Transcending social workers' experiences is aligned with determining the extent of children living on and off the streets considering the existing policies, current practices, and outcomes.

It is at this point that the researcher discovered that in South Africa the number of children living on and off the streets is difficult to quantify for diverse reasons. Julien (2022:161) is clear when concluding that, it is in fact difficult to determine the number of children on and off street as their lifestyle is dynamic. More reasons given to support this claim are that, these children constantly change location, avoiding to be caught, they commonly live in in public spaces like markets, parks, buses, or train stations to name a few. It is further mentioned that most of these spots have no access to the basics such as food, water, and clothing which is a serious concern to the researcher whose interest is in prevention care services.

### **1.2.1 Risk factors leading to children living on and off the streets**

The researcher used the introductory section to present a preliminary overview of risk factors for children living on and off the streets and utilised the ecological system theory, which speaks to the environment of vulnerable children reflected in section 1.5. McCoy and Keen (2022:231), Terre des Hommes (2015:20) explored risk factors and demonstrated how specific and diverse studies refer to a scenario of child maltreatment. Although Hurford (2016:1-4) does not directly identify child maltreatment as a major driver of children living on and off the streets, their analysis of family dysfunctionality and the environment of maltreated children connects well with the problem. To create a bigger picture of the extent of this problem, the researcher summarises some of the key findings by Fender (2016:2-5) focusing on the notions of ontogenic, microsystem, exosystem and macrosystem (Table 1.1.). The matrix summarising these shows factors which lead to children on and off the streets is as follows:

#### **Table 1.1: Risk factors leading to children living on and off the streets**

Child age group 0-3		Child age group 4-6	Child age group 7-11	Child age group 12-18
<p><b>Ontogenic development</b> Father and mother seen as perpetrators of abuse leading to children living on and off streets</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individuals who were abused as children have higher potential to abuse their own children</li> <li>Raised by single parents with no social support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parent experienced poor parenting during early childhood</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poor adoption to school</li> <li>Lack of integration into peer group</li> <li>Sexually abused as a child</li> <li>Confused patterns of attachment with mother</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents were born from early pregnancy with lack of preparation, experiencing loss, isolation and exhaustion</li> <li>Parents cultural belief and perceptions</li> <li>Low level of education</li> </ul>
<p><b>Microsystem</b>  Family seen as perpetrator of abuse leading to children living on and off streets  Parent and extended families sometimes contribute to the maltreatment of the child</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Infant and toddlers are likely to be abused because of their ages</li> <li>Babies born prematurely or with physical or mental disability are likely to be abused</li> <li>Infant who test positive for alcohol and other drugs or HIV</li> <li>Babies with difficult temperaments are likely to be abused</li> <li>Not satisfied with the child</li> <li>Does not enjoy parenting</li> <li>Young parent</li> <li>Not understanding role as a caregiver</li> <li>Lack of knowledge of child development</li> <li>Substance abuse</li> <li>Poverty</li> <li>Stress in the family environment</li> <li>Interpersonal conflict between partners</li> <li>Single parent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Excessive health or medical problems</li> <li>Developmental delays</li> <li>Display negative behaviours</li> <li>Their negative behaviour is overexaggerated by parent</li> <li>Children experience conflicting relationship of mothers</li> <li>Children get involved in their parents' marital conflicts</li> <li>Perception of child</li> <li>Inappropriate child expectations around development</li> <li>Authoritarian</li> <li>Substance abuse</li> <li>Depression</li> <li>Aggressive behaviour</li> <li>Coercive child-rearing</li> <li>Little positive interactions</li> <li>Family lacks leadership, closeness, and negotiation skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Age of exploring</li> <li>Oppositional or problem behaviours</li> <li>Inappropriate sexual behaviours</li> <li>Experiencing Low self-esteem, depression, withdrawn, anger, aggression and antisocial personality</li> <li>Obsessive-compulsive disorder and serious mental illness</li> <li>Negative perception of own identity, loneliness</li> <li>Lack of impulse control</li> <li>Parent are unemployed or on substance abuse</li> <li>Poor communication</li> <li>Lack of emotional closeness</li> <li>Social isolation, disorganised</li> <li>Stepfather in the home</li> <li>Victim not close to mother</li> <li>No physical affection from father</li> <li>Low income</li> <li>Family isolation</li> <li>Patriarchal family</li> <li>Hostility between partners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Likely to have early pregnancy</li> <li>Aggressive/ hostile behaviour to people and animals</li> <li>Absconding behaviour</li> <li>Withdraws from social relationships and poor peer relationships</li> <li>Truancy and delinquent type behaviour</li> <li>Fire setting, eating disorders,</li> <li>Alcohol and other drug use</li> <li>Depression, and suicidal symptoms</li> <li>Post-traumatic stress disorder</li> <li>Increased sexual behaviours</li> <li>Suffering sexual abuse and rape from uncles, mother's boyfriend, bigger brothers or step-father</li> <li>Suffer from cognitive distortions and misperceptions</li> <li>Father with record of arrest</li> <li>Lack emotional closeness</li> <li>Lack of supervision by nonoffending parent</li> <li>Mother not physically or psychologically available</li> <li>Father experiencing unemployment</li> <li>Role reversal behaviour</li> <li>Poor marital history</li> <li>Separation or divorce</li> <li>Family isolation</li> <li>More children in the home</li> <li>Violence between partners</li> <li>Abuse of animals</li> <li>Multiple stressful life events</li> <li>Poor living conditions and disorganised</li> </ul>

<p><b>Exosystem</b></p> <p>Community, work, schools, churches Police Hospitals...</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social isolation</li> <li>• Lack of social connections</li> <li>• Poor social support network</li> <li>• Lack of family friends</li> <li>• Difficulty associated with child care</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experiencing poverty in the neighbourhood</li> <li>• Lack of caring individual in the child's life</li> <li>• Neighbourhood lacks both informal and formal social supports</li> <li>• Living in a violent community</li> <li>• Lack connection with community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of a stable address in the community</li> <li>• Social supports</li> <li>• Neighbourhood that lacks resources</li> <li>• Fathers who do not access family and local support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of social network</li> <li>• Lack of extended family</li> <li>• Fewer peer relationships</li> <li>• Communities with high levels of violence</li> <li>• High rate of running away from home</li> <li>• Lack support from parents or other family members</li> </ul>
<p><b>Macrosystem</b></p> <p>The bigger society and cultures attitudes towards beliefs about violence i.e. corporate punishment Television shows, movies and social media</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Society's beliefs may perpetrate abuse</li> <li>• Cultural values that support violence</li> <li>• Attitudes toward how mothers should behave as a parent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corporal punishment as the only way of discipline that works</li> <li>• Culturally promoted attitudes and behaviours about parental rights to physically punish</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spending whole day watching TV or on Cell-phones resulting in isolation</li> <li>• Stereotype of male dominance in sexual relationships</li> <li>• Social tolerance for sexual interest in children</li> <li>• Barriers to women's equality</li> <li>• Denial by society that sexual abuse exists</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Patriarchal system</li> <li>• Male entitlement</li> <li>• Sex role stereotypes</li> <li>• Social tolerance for objectification of children</li> <li>• Religion and law sanctioning of sexual interaction</li> <li>• Culture of silence around sexual violence and rape</li> </ul>

Source: Adopted from Fender (2016:2-5).

Commenting on the risk factors in Table 1.1, child maltreatment engendering the recurrence of children living on and off the street was identified at infant, toddler, middle childhood, and adolescence levels. In view of this integration, frontline civil rights organisations like Lawyers for Human Rights understand that a lack of political support to promote the welfare of children regardless of their status and backgrounds was another form of risk (George & Elphick 2014:8). Subsequently, the struggle of undocumented and stateless children, including refugees and asylum seekers, was relevant to the study (George & Elphick 2014:8-10). Generally, the researcher noted that children without proper identification documents were deprived of their right to access basic needs, including housing, education, social grants, and other government benefits, resulting in a “push factor” that exacerbates the recurrence of children living on and off the streets.

### 1.2.2 Upscaling prevention services

Considering all risk factors and the researcher's view of children living on and off the streets, the idea of upscaling prevention care services envisions a model of service delivery in an integrated way to achieve independent living. Thus, the idea of social workers' experiences, challenges, and solutions paving the way for the full realisation of the study objective resonates from this paradigm to stop the cycle of children living on and off the streets.

In view of the above preliminary remarks, Kaime-Atterhög, Persson and Ahlberg (2017:579) reflects good intentions in caring for children. However, there appears to be some failures in providing more support and guidance for social workers committed to the implementation of prevention programmes. Mackie, Thomas, and Bibbings, (2017:81) explain why maintaining a balance between care practices, prevention and legal rights brings about sustainable solutions. The researcher agrees with this suggestion believing that it is also supported by Mackie, Thomas and Bibbings (2017:81):

...whilst a legal right to homelessness prevention assistance is an effective driver of change, without attention to implementation and the quality of services being offered, legislation cannot realise its full potential impact.

Further research provides comparative cost analysis related to prevention and care to establish a better way of dealing with the problem. In this regard, Hopkins, Reaper, Vos and Brough (2020: 8) profiled:

"The different studies all show high total costs of homelessness. In the UK it was estimated to be over £1 billion annually (US\$1.2bn), and in Canada CA\$7.05 billion in 2013 (US\$6.7bn). In Australia a study by AHURI calculated youth homelessness alone to be AUS\$574 million annually. In Orange County, California in the United States – which has a population of 3.2 million – the cost was US\$299 million in 2014/15"

The authors continued showing the cost of homelessness here in South Africa, using an example of the City of Cape Town saying that R744m a year is spent on homelessness, and that is R51,811 per person per year or \$4,318 per person per month (Hopkins, Reaper, Vos and Brough 2020: 4).

The above proposals are in line with McCoy and Keen (2022:223) advocating for sustainable solutions in the child welfare system. However, drawing on personal

experience, the researcher is always concerned that when it comes to community services, the government does not take non-governmental organisations (NGOs) seriously as strong partners in dealing with the most vulnerable people in society. The theory of the mixed economy of welfare, learnt from some of the international models of good practice (Spicker 2022:158), is one way the researcher has identified a gap in building relationships to upscale services as presented in Table 1.2.

**Table 1.2: A general model of social welfare services**

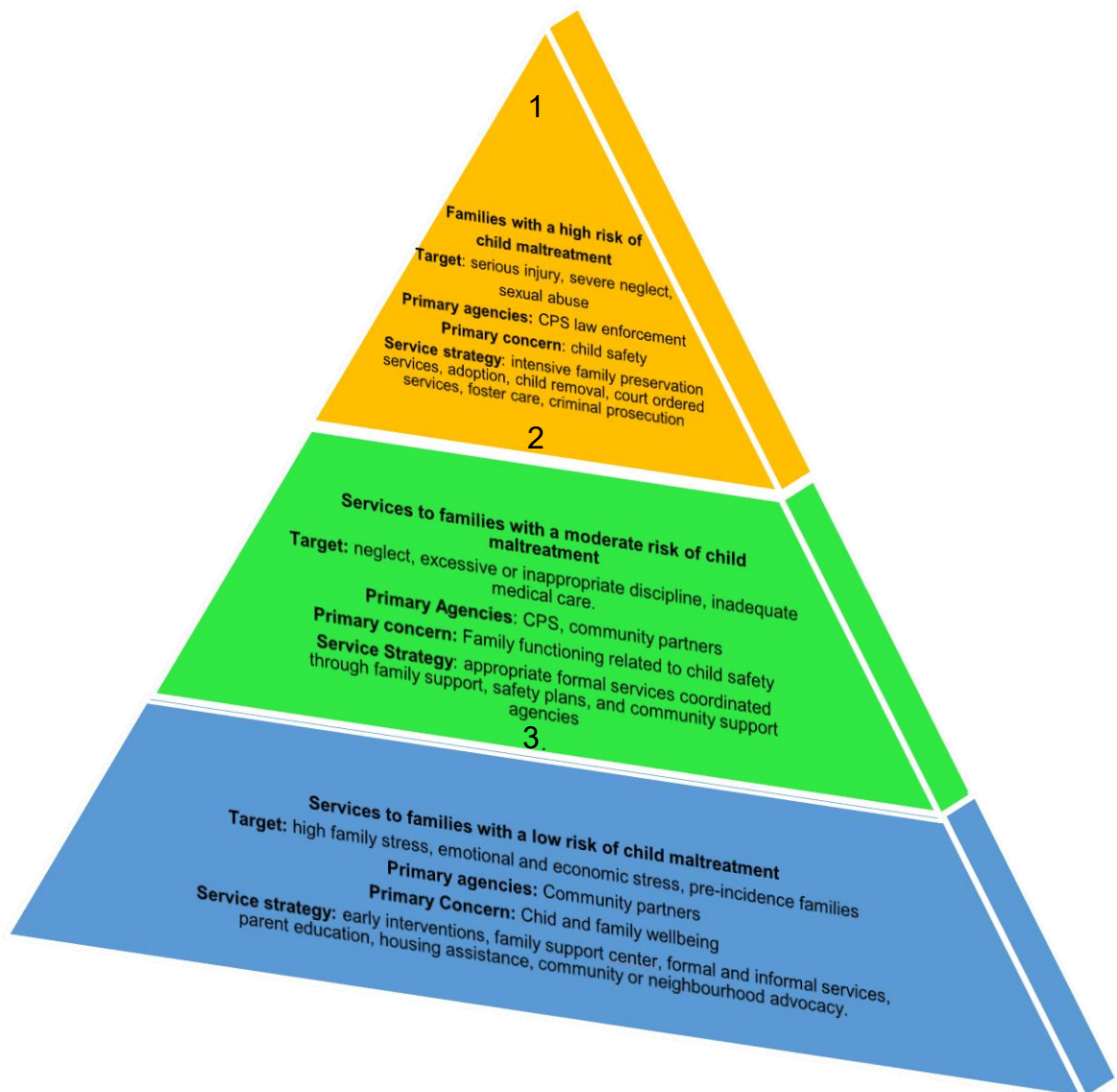
	<u>Rights</u>	<u>Basic security</u>	<u>Empowerment</u>
<b>Universal standards</b>	Citizenship	Minimum income standards	Voting
<b>Common interests</b>	Community safety – for example, fire services, coastguard	Medical care	Access to information
<b>Shared objectives</b>	Housing standards and provision; minimum income standards	Securing economic prosperity; Education public health	
<b>Protecting individuals</b>	Social care	Child protection; employment protection	Redress

*Source:* Spicker (2022:158)

The researcher welcomed the table in the study because it clearly shows that “the state does not operate in isolation; rather, it acts in conjunction with a number of non-statutory organisations” (Spicker 2022:158) to render prevention services not only for vulnerable children, notably children living on and off the streets, but also to other at-risk communities and individuals. With this understating, Spicker (2022:159) recommends that, “the welfare state is a collective ideal, based in a sense of mutual responsibility and solidarity” which the researcher also strongly supports.

She wanted to capitalise on both partnerships and solidarity to make the pyramid model of prevention at three levels work (as seen in Figure 1.1), which are: (1) families with high risk factors of child maltreatment, (2) families with moderate risk

factors, (3) and families with low risk factors (McCoy & Keen 2022:223).



**Figure 1.1: Integrated service delivery model**

*Adapted from: McCoy and Keen (2022:322)*

The researcher wishes to inform her reader that the proposed pyramided integrated service delivery model and its three levels are not directly a demonstration of social workers' experiences and challenges or even solutions related to children living on and off the streets. The researcher was inspired to construct a bigger picture of social workers' critical areas in their involvement in families at high risk of child maltreatment. The discussion on what she believed to be their challenges to implementing integrated prevention services is enhanced through the pyramid and a



reflection on the strategic integrated communication framework for child protection organizations in South Africa (Degenaar, Fourie, and Holtzhausen 2022:801):

**a) Low-risk families: early intervention**

Low-risk families or homes mentioned previously denote the earliest level of intervention that the pyramid of integrated service delivery advocates for. Its main aims are to prevent any signs of child maltreatment so that the situation does not escalate, pushing children onto the streets. Caiels, Milne and Beadle-Brown (2021:402) suggest that using strength-based approach can make a difference in the situation of low-risk families as the following paragraph provides more clarity:

It is an approach that stresses the importance of people's own characteristics, the type of environment they live in, and the multiple contexts that influence their lives. It postulates that interventions must be focussed on clients' competencies and the resources at their disposal or accessible to them. Clients are considered to be the 'experts' in their situation, and practitioners as partners whose theoretical and technical knowledge must be used to help them, particularly by empowering clients rather than labelling them (Caiels, Milne and Beadle-Brown 2021:402).

To summarise the above model, it is understood that families with low-risks of children maltreatment, early intervention will be based on family assessment to identify and stop any signs deemed to be potential treats to children. It is also understood that this type of intervention involves collaboration and cooperations among key role players including parents and children at the centre of the process. Hence, "...a collaborative process between the person supported by services and those supporting them, allowing them to work together to determine an outcome that draws on the person's strengths and assets" (Caiels, Milne and Beadle-Brown 2021:403). To realise this goal, priority was given to parenting skills, preventing teen pregnancy, teaching conflict negotiation skills to young people, and promoting values that root out violence, sexism, and racism in the pyramid model (McCoy & Keen 2022:223). All these values are consistent with the Children Act 38 of 2005, updated in 2023 where directives are given to monitor parental responsibilities and rights of children which include among others child protection, prevention and early intervention (Social Development Department 2023:45- 62). Implementation of the law is vitally important and significant as such commitment will motivate CYCC social

workers who want to render improved prevention care services in collaboration with other professionals and stakeholders (Mattessich and Johnson 2018: 9).

### **b) Moderate-risk families: family support services**

The pyramid of the integrated service delivery model entails family support to mitigate the risks of child maltreatment for moderate-risk families, as described by McCoy and Keen (2022:223). At this level, the researcher recorded that prevention service strategies relate to more appropriate formal programmes, such as coordinated services for family support and safety plans achieved with the involvement of community support agencies. Currently, to meet this expectation, Department of Social Development (2023:341-375) came up with core programmes and included are activities like early childhood development, child protection system and prevention combined with early intervention, child in need of care and protection and alternative care. The researcher therefore observed that all these programmes appear to play an indispensable role given critical scenarios such as severe conditions of poverty-stricken families, child-headed households with limited support, vulnerable refugees, asylum seekers, and other individuals who find themselves in severe social crisis. Looking at the implications of this framework, the researcher realised that services such as child grants, placement of vulnerable children into learning institutions, providing housing assistance, and ensuring easy access to the justice system and Home Affairs legal documents are not constantly provided to prevent the recurrence of children living on and off the streets. Lawyers for Human Rights gave examples in the following two scenarios:

*I was born in Lesotho but I am a South African. That is the only thing I want in my life. I feel like I am a mess. There is nothing I can do. I have spent many years sitting at home and doing nothing. When I wanted to write my matric, it was a mess- I did not have an ID. When you go to even computer lessons, they still want a document and I felt bad. There is a lot I want to achieve but I cannot because I do not have an ID. In years to come, Neo must school, but they want his certificate and he does not have one (George & Elphick 2014:69).*

*As father, with undocumented wife, I am not recognised, I am unable to apply for children's documentation. My children cannot access grants and other services. Even when I show my ID to apply, officials say they need my wife's documents, and she is not documented. About two years*

*ago, social workers said they would assist me, but they never came back. I have no hope in them, and my family suffers a lot... (George & Elphick 2014:77).*

Despite a recommendation by Department of Social Development (2023:341-375) advancing integration of local services in respect with norms and standards to make accessible alternative care, foster care, CYCCs, drop-in centres and adoptions, the above scenarios were arguably classic examples speaking of the many frustrations social workers face when seeking to deliver preventative integrated services to children living on and off the streets. Yet, the law clearly protects their rights when referring to sections 28 and 29 of the Constitution (Mablane 2022:14). The researcher uses both the literature control and the research findings in Chapter Three to describe the delivery of preventive services.

### **c) High-risk families: statutory/residential care services**

The pyramided integrated service delivery model to prevent child maltreatment and children living on and off the streets required a higher level of intervention that involves the removal of a child from the family described as high risk. This level deals with conditions that are more serious, with issues such as physical injury, sexual abuse, and severe neglect, even requiring the involvement of court-ordered services. Crosson-Tower (2014:317) link the removal of the child victim with alternative residential care.

Malatji and Dube (2017:111) record that challenges faced by social workers involved in CYCCs were myriad. They list issues such as the underfunding of residential care centres, inadequate infrastructure, limited space to accommodate children living on and off the streets, limited numbers of social workers, and logistical challenges such as a vehicle to reach out to children and families. Further to this report, the authors experienced instances where social workers were not able to speak the myriads of languages required to address all the children and parents from different cultural backgrounds (Malatji & Dube 2017:12).

Crosson-Tower (2014:363) argues that functioning in such difficult working environments discourages social workers who are consistently involved with traumatised children. Consequently, unsupported social workers are exposed to

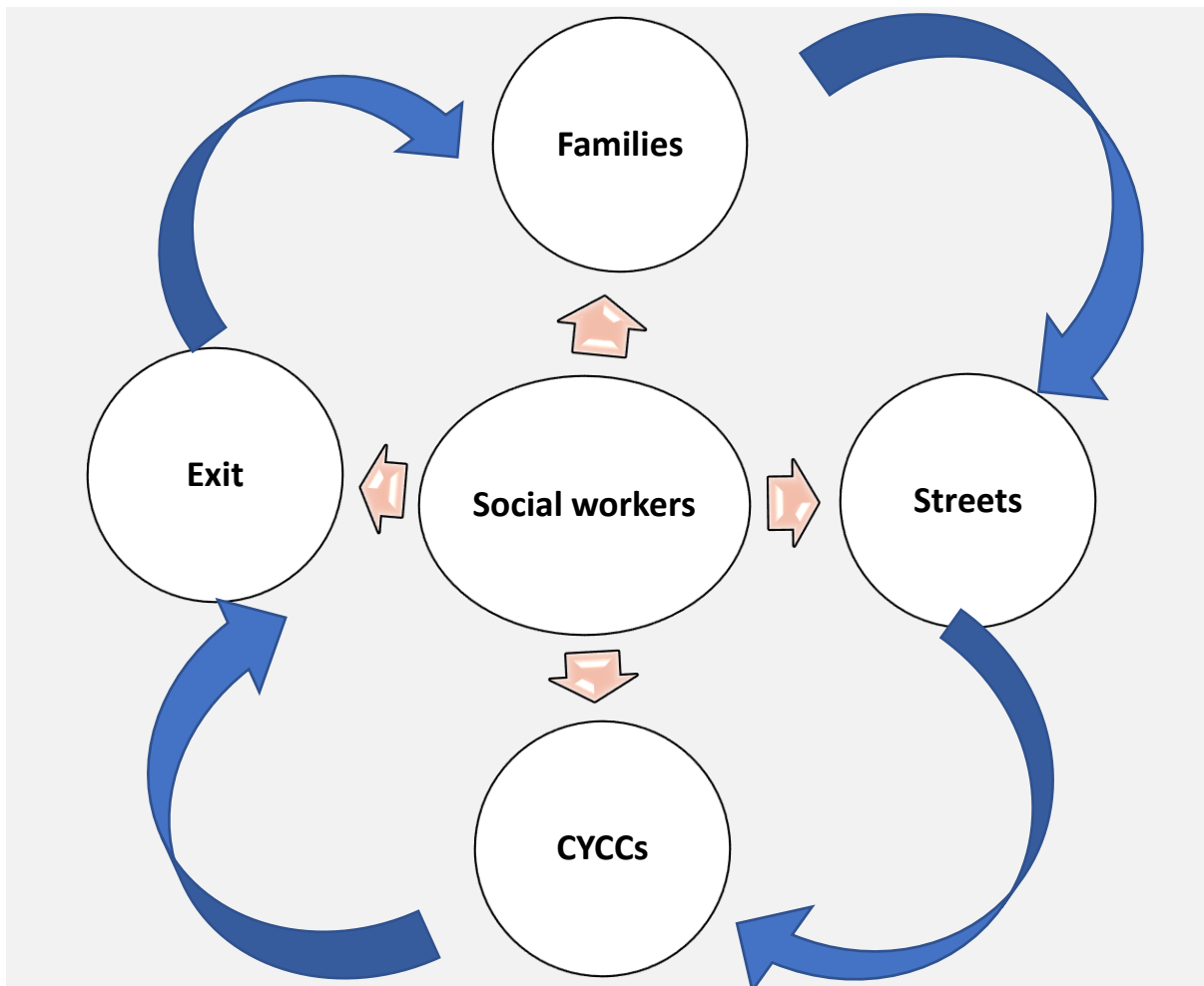
burnout and this may eventually pave the way to them abandoning their work, especially when they cannot cope. The researcher therefore concludes that social workers in the field of statutory and residential care are working under restrictive conditions which have caused them to underperform in their work with children and parents to address the recurrence of children living on and off the streets. Proposals for change will be explored at a later stage in this research study.

### **1.2.3 Reintegration services**

The researcher proposes a permanent solution through the means of reuniting a child with his or her parents, or otherwise opting for adoption. Adding this service to the pyramided integrated service delivery model will make it more integrated and operational, as the researcher wants to make it clear that residential care, such as the services provided by the CYCCs in this study, cannot be an end in itself. However, it is her opinion that social workers experience structural challenges to implement the above objective.

A child always deserves a stable environment; if the natural family cannot provide it, adoption becomes the last option (Crosson-Tower 2014:323). To clarify challenges, the researcher is aware of instances of parents who were unwilling to take back their children, whereas some children had no living parents and no guardians wanted to accept responsibility (Inter-Agency Group on Children's Reintegration 2016:1).

Further, to clarify the challenges experienced, the researcher created a scenario illustrating social worker's long journey in relation to what she personally terms "a narrative of children back to streets", reflected through a child from family to street, from street to the CYCC, from CYCC back to his or her family, and from family back to the street. This is illustrated in Figure 1.2.



**Figure 1.2: Cycle of recurrence on streets – the researcher’s perception**

The idea behind the figure is that social workers need to be actively involved in preventing the cycle of children living on and off the streets. The researcher believes that existing policies do not cater for the real needs of children living on and off the streets to prevent this cycle and therefore this has become a setback for professional social workers rendering prevention services. One of the reported issues includes a lack of clarity in laws relating to the accreditation of adoption social workers. In addition, findings also reveal that access to adoption has inherently become a complicated process with a lot of bureaucracy involved to finalise adoption (Swartz and Luyt 2022:178).

With the line of advocacy, Skhosana, Schenck and Botha (2014:226) illustrate the need for a change after interviewing frustrated outreach workers who were aware of the experiences of social workers:

*Our outreach workers often work in Sunnyside, and when they meet the child on streets, they cannot remove the child because they do not have the capacity. Our own social worker can also not remove the child because she also does not have the capacity. They have call Social Development to remove the child and they will take forever before coming and sometimes they never show up.*

All these contributions have inspired the researcher to conduct direct interviews with social workers and social auxiliary workers to record their views on the experiences, challenges, and solutions related to rendering effective prevention services.

### **1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Having presented the background of the study, the researcher can now introduce the study problem statement – the driver for her chief objectives. It should be noted that a good formulation enhances the breadth of the study and helps discern priority issues, including future research considerations (Grant & Osanloo 2014:17). Accordingly, in Terrell (2016:3) it is explained a good formulation of the research statement is required to help elucidate the study's focus which Pardede (2018:9-10) explains differently saying, “a problem statement concisely overviews the issues or problems existing in the concerned area selected for the research area which drives the researcher to do in-depth study and analysis in order to understand the issues and/or solve the problem.”

Keeping that clarity, the researcher brought into the dialogue Sivuyile, Sizolile, Lefa, Musawenkosi and Nqabakazi (2014:1) and their interlocutor (ANDRIONI 2018: 44) who state that the phenomenon of children living on and off the streets is a social issue resulting from a diversity of integrated social factors and intolerable situation. This “is not only due to financial instability in families but also involves other intervening variables. Authorities and institutions would therefore need to pay more attention to such factors, so as to enable children to live in a stable family environment” (Mohapanele 2023:23).

McCoy and Keen (2022:223) and Crosson-Tower (2014:205-208) ask critical questions on how children ended up on the streets, under what family circumstances

they were forced to leave their homes, what the causal risk factors were, and how to respond going forward.

Skhosana, Schenck and Botha (2014:230) contribute with a report revealing factors hampering care service delivery for homeless children in residential care centres in Pretoria: “The research shows clearly that the funding required for ensuring the sustainability of the organisations is insufficient, and that the human resources are unstable.”

Sharing the same interest, Malatji and Dube (2017:110) focused on Ekurhuleni, concluding that service providers faced enormous challenges of human and resource capacities in rendering care services to children living in CYCCs: “...there are challenges related to preserving the culture of children as a result of constraints of resources and limited staff diversity.”

In appreciation of all these insights from the different contributors, the researcher’s major concern, however, was that integrated care services to address the recurrence of children living on and off the streets were under-researched. Another area of major concern was that key service providers, notably professional social workers, were not specifically introduced and their experiences, challenges, and solutions were not specifically explored. To be specific, reference is made to Friberg and Martinsson (2017:10), who recommend the following:

*Social workers work with children in need and provide services to ensure children’s rights. They are involved daily as to how to keep the children safe and which provider in society can give the best tools for protection. As a social worker there is a need to work strategically as a civil society appeals to the protection of human rights, especially of minorities and children living on and off the streets that are often ignored by the government ...the importance for social workers to include the participation of children in practices, in terms of initial approaches on the street and concerning the rights of education and a place to stay.*

In accordance with engagement of the preliminary literature reports, the present study set out to investigate the underlying experiences, challenges, and solutions for preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria. Social workers’ experiences and challenges include a complex

working environment characterised by maltreated children living with family, children on the streets, children living in CYCCs, and a permanent solution through family reunification or placement (Crosson-Tower 2014:358). This study contributes through social workers' stories generated from interviews in dialogue with the literature review. The researcher engaged in an in-depth literature search relating to the experiences of social workers in rendering integrated prevention care services to respond to the recurrence of children living on and off the streets.

In respect of the local context, the researcher's overall impression was that there was no direct literature that specifically focused on the recurrence of children living on and off the streets. Consequently, the university library was used for a broader search to explore the phenomenon under study. A variety of reliable sources, such as published books, peer reviewed articles, different university repositories, and newspapers, were combed through, as well as numerous electronic databases such as Ebscohost, Sabinet, Sage, PsycINFO, EconLit, and other educational sources. Keywords used in the search included children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria; prevention services; and experiences and challenges of social workers and the recurrence of children living on and off the streets. The table below depicts some of the literature researched based on the topic under the study.



**Table 1.3: Summary of studies conducted on homeless children**

<b>Author's name(s) and year of publication</b>	<b>Title of study</b>	<b>Type of research</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Field</b>
Skhosana et al (2014)	Factors Enabling and Hampering Social Welfare Services Rendered to Street Children in Pretoria: Perspectives of Service Providers	Qualitative research	South Africa	Social work
Hills, Meyer-Weitz, and Asante (2016)	The lived experiences of street children in Durban, South Africa: Violence, substance use, and resilience.	Qualitative research	South Africa	School of Health and Welfare
Myburgh et al (2015)	The lived experiences of children living on the streets of Hillbrow	Qualitative research	South Africa	Department of Education and Psychology
Henwood, Wenzel, Mangano, Hombs, Padgett, Byrne, Rice, Butts & Uretsky (2015)	The Grand Challenge of Ending Homelessness	Qualitative research	America	Social work and social welfare
Friberg and Martinsson (2017)	Problems and Solutions when Dealing with Street Children: A qualitative study based on experiences from Social Workers in Bloemfontein	Qualitative study	South Africa	School of Health and Welfare
Moorhead (2017)	The Lived Experience of Professional Identity: A Year-Long Study with Newly Qualified Social Workers	Qualitative research	Australia	Department of Arts and Education
Sivuyile et al (2014)	The Phenomenon of Street Children in South Africa	Qualitative	South Africa	Education
Mohapanele, KG., 2023	The impact of family structure and its dynamics on street children	Qualitative research	South Africa	Department of Social Work
Skhosana, RM. 2020	The Dilemma Faced by NPOs in Retaining Social Workers	Qualitative research	South Africa	Social work
Social Development Department, 2023.	Children's Act & Regulations	Qualitative	South Africa	Social Development

Once again, the researcher reminds her reader that the preliminary literature review as depicted in Table 1.3 provides invaluable information, but it does not directly address the study topic. Thus, the researcher did not duplicate this research, but sought to make a unique contribution by engaging the existing literature to develop a working theory for the experiences, challenges, and solutions of social workers to prevent the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane. She believed that through this process the study was not just an ambitious project aimed at obtaining academic credentials at the end of the day, but a cutting-edge, stimulating, and ongoing reflection on this important topic.

#### **1.4 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY**

The rationale of the study implies a declaration revealing why the study was to be undertaken, giving its background and motivation (Terrell 2016:264; Creswell 2016:301). Keeping that context, the researcher's first interest in undertaking this present project dated back to 2001 and 2003, when she was a volunteer at The Haven shelter for vulnerable homeless women and children in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal. Her involvement became an open opportunity that exposed her to the experiences of social workers working with homeless women and children and the challenges they face in rendering integrated prevention care services. As a result, the researcher realised a need to research the experiences, challenges, and solutions of social workers in implementing prevention care services to address what she perceived as the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in the city. Other issues identified were structural weaknesses owing to poor government social welfare policies which fail to address risk factors in the home setting, on the streets, and in residential care facilities, and fail to move toward a permanent solution.

The second source of the researcher's interest arose from her master's research in Theology and Community Development, a programme located within the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Her study focused on NGOs dealing with homeless women and children hosted in residential care facilities and found that service providers (NGOs) faced challenges in empowering homeless women and children to live independent lives. In undertaking the current research, the researcher wanted to shift her focus to conceptualise

theories for the prevention of the recurrence of children living on and off the streets, exploring social workers' experiences, challenges, and solutions.

The researcher has obtained an honours degree in Social Work and acquired integrity in this profession to address the most pressing issues society faces. From this academic exposure came her third source of inspiration and she understood social workers' role to be more than delivering a package of care services, but a step further as justified in the following claim (Friberg & Martinsson 2017:10):

*Social work is practiced by educated social workers with the aim of improving conditions for people suffering from social deprivation. To apply theories regarding social systems and human behaviour, social work engages in the interaction between people and their environments. The principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to perform social work.*

Since she is interested in children's rights and social justice, the researcher sought to acquire professional social workers' experiences, challenges, and solutions in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets. It is therefore through these three sources of inspiration that the study rationale found its expression to achieve its objectives. It drew on library research interacting with published and unpublished sources relevant to the scope of the theme. The search included books, theses, scholarly articles, local media platform, periodicals, and academic papers presented in different conferences. Hand-in-hand with the library findings, the study benefitted extensively from the primary findings generated through the structured interviews with selected social workers from CYCCs in the City of Tshwane.

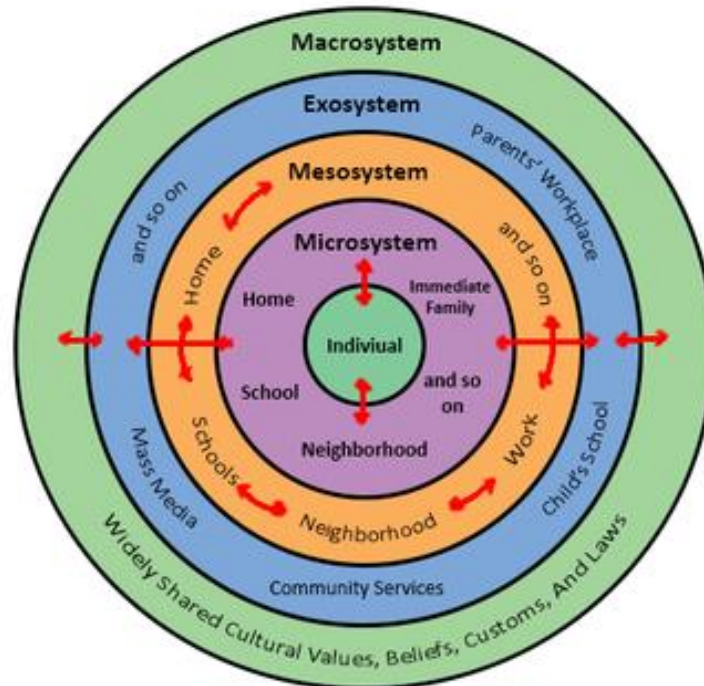
## **1.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

After stating the rationale, the study's theoretical framework will now be presented, serving as tool to engage the research findings with an open-minded spirit. Foremost, the word theory implies "a set of interrelated constructs, definitions and propositions that present a systematic view of a phenomenon by specifying relations among variables, with the purpose of explaining and predicting a phenomenon" (Anfra & Merts 2014:200). A theory "could be seen as an explanation of why something

happens, and, sometimes, how something happens as well as statement of what happens” (Omenka, Obo, Agishi & Coker 2017:131). From here, the idea of a “theoretical framework” is the underlying structure consisting of concepts or theories that informs the study (Merriam & Tisdell 2015:86). It is literally a blueprint, serving as a guide to build and support a study, while indicating the philosophical, epistemological, and methodological approaches of the dissertation (Grant & Osanloo 2014:12).

With the above demarcations in mind, the researcher realised that the theory of ecological systems chosen to drive the present study was an integral part of broader social work dimensions advocating for holistic, person-in-environment, multidimensional, and client-centred solutions (Moorhead 2017:130). It then became clear that social workers were at the centre of the theory that she wanted to use in investigating their experiences and challenges working in the environment and social context of vulnerable children.

Shaw (2019:7) has also used the theory of ecological systems in a study “exploring the capacity-building needs of social workers to prepare youth leaving child and youth care centres in Ekurhuleni, Gauteng Province under children aging out of foster care” acknowledging its initiator Uri Bronfenbrenner. According to Eriksson, Ghazinour and Hammarstrom (2018:416), this theory is about human development. It involves the knowledge of children's development, their direct social relationships, the world around them, and their quality of life (Ettekal & Mahoney 2017:230). Following this explanation, the use of the ecological systems theory is justified in research conducted seeking to understand a critical environment of child sexual abuse (Martinello 2020:327). With this perspective, the researcher’s attention was moreover drawn to the pressing context of maltreated children and social workers rendering prevention services in different social structures. It therefore became clear for her to consult the four aspects of the ecological systems theory drawing on Shaw (2019:7), Vélez-Agosto, Soto-Crespo, Vizcarrondo-Oppenheimer, Vega-Molina and Coll (2017:902) to explain the environment of vulnerable children as shown in Figure 1.3 below.



**Figure 1.3: Ecological systems theory**

Source: Vélez-Agosto et al (2017:902)

### 1.5.1 Microsystem: immediate environment

As seen in Figure 1.3, the notion of the microsystem is about environment and social structures, most notably the home. Martinello (2020:327) supports this observation by indicating how the idea of microsystem is the ecological level immediately interacting with children and their development “(e.g., families interact with teachers, perpetrators often interact with families).” Issues such as child maltreatment and neglect at home environment should be regarded as a key contributor to children living on and off streets. Abuse of children in school environment also may be viewed as another practice signalling factors for children living on and off streets. One can mention that, such critical areas and others entail everyday life and risk factors for child vulnerability. When children are neglected, the result is that they start to feel inferior and this contributes towards poor school performance, leading them to feel useless and causing a desire to survive on their own (Sivuyile et al. 2014:2). This analysis shows how the issue of child abuse can destroy their development and future ambitions to thrive. In fact, they will not see education as a tool to unlock their potential, because they do not have family support at home.

### **1.5.2 Mesosystem: connections**

As for the second dimension of the theory of ecological system, a focus is on above a single environment setting to consider for instance a link between two microsystems to establish their relationships (Shaw 2019:8). Differently, “the mesosystem is made up of linkage between the different microsystems in a person's life. In other words, how school and home interact creates a mesosystem” (Crawford 2020:2). Along these lines, the author’s opinion is that if parents and teachers engage each other on a mutual basis regarding a child’s education, there is a functioning mesosystem. Children then feel supported and their needs are addressed, as parents connect with larger structures beyond their homes. Consequently, the meso level becomes very important in the context of children faced with issues such as family disintegration, physical and psychological maltreatment, lack of parental control and supervision, parental absence, and value clashes between parents and children (Sivuyile et al. 2014:2).

### **1.5.3 Exosystem: indirect environment**

The third dimension, namely the exosystem, is about the existing relationship between the structures of the micro- and mesosystems and how this indirectly influences children. For instance, Crawford (2020:2) talks about drastic policies and decisions at the parents’ workplace which sometimes result in parents taking out their frustrations at home, resulting in neglecting the needs of their children and even maltreating them. It is then this context of a hostile environment that promotes the abuse or neglect of children. During empirical research, this element was analysed (see Chapter Three, section 2.1.1.2).

### **1.5.4 Macrosystem: social and cultural values**

The macrosystem is the fourth dimension of the ecological systems theory. Referring to Crawford (2020:2 of 3), “macrosystem creates a pattern of interaction between and among the different micro-, meso-, and exosystems”, “...special emphasis is given to cultures within the groups, opportunity structures that are created by systems and experienced by individuals, and patterns of exchange within and among groups.” The author explains the perspective of the dimension relating to instances of parents who leave their homeland to start a new life in other countries because of civil wars. It is the family instability that family victims are subjected to which results in an

environment that exposes them and their children to high risks, including children living on and off the streets. The researcher notes that the macrosystem may provide the circumstances in which undocumented and stateless children struggle to access basic services without home affairs documents. Shaw (2020:8) suggests that “the macrosystem dictates the governmental law and policies such as Children’s Act no 38 of 2005 and many more that has a direct impact on their lives of the foster youth...” Overall, social workers’ journey with vulnerable children and their efforts to address the recurrence of children living on and off the streets will be more developed in this study. Both the analysis and interpretation of the research findings will be linked to main the study theme to meet its objectives.

## **1.6 RESEARCH QUESTION, GOAL, AND OBJECTIVES**

Considering the above theoretical framework guideline, the following section was concisely developed to clarify the central research question, research goal, and objectives formulated to direct the study.

### **1.6.1 Research question**

The researcher understood that the main aim of the research question is to serve as a guideline, helping to succinctly define the main study problem and leading to achieving the envisaged objective. Beyond this personal view, the researcher also looked to Goldschmidt (2021:2) who says that “asking questions as a way to explore issues, probe into consequences, think of alternatives, raise new concepts is a very ancient mode of enhancing thought and knowledge.” Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault (2016:73) contribute to the development of the research questions, indicating that they arise from a critical review of previous studies to discern underlying issues that have not been adequately answered. Creswell (2015:70), taking all these indications into account, summarises that the central question is a broad question that asks for an explanation of the central phenomenon or concept in a study. He goes on to advise researchers to pose the central question, consistent with the emerging methodology of qualitative research, as a general issue so as not to limit the inquiry. In asking the research question “typically begins with the words *how* or *what* (instead of *why*, which is typically associated with qualitative research)” (Creswell 2015:70).

Accordingly, the central research question of the present study was developed after discovering that the recurrence of children living on and off the streets and social workers' experiences, challenges, and solutions linked to this phenomenon was a vital area that remains under-researched in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria. Flowing from the research problem and preliminary literature frame, the researcher therefore asked the following question: *What is the extent of social workers' experiences, challenges, and possible solutions in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria?* This guiding question comes back in Chapter Two, section 2.2.1.

To narrow the focus of her inquiry, the researcher proceeded by asking three key sub-questions to explore in descriptive and analytical ways the areas that emerged from the main study theme:

- What are the experiences of social workers in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets?
- What are the challenges faced by social workers in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets?
- What are the proposed solutions of social workers in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets?

### **1.6.2 Research goal**

The researcher's understanding of the research goal is tied to an important step involved in handling the fieldwork findings to generate knowledge. She extended her horizons of understanding the research goal by reading insights from Zapata-Barrero and Yalaz (2018:115-115) who point out that with the research goals, the researcher is able to develop new research questions and also can test and refine new "theories and guiding concept." Mouton (2022:79) refers to it as an instrument with a particular purpose that helps elucidate the envisaged study objectives. With this clarity, the researcher also noted that a good formulation of the study goal becomes the foundation for knowledge and understanding (Tam, Paris-Ann Ingledew, Berry, Verma, and Giuliani 2016:360). The goal for the current study was thus formulated as follows: *To gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences, challenges, and*



*solutions of social workers in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria.*

### **1.6.3 Research objectives**

In setting up her research objectives, the researcher had many ideas about what specifically she wants to achieve at the end of the study and its significant impact in the long run. In constructing her objectives, she considered that the study objective should be more concrete and measurable (Babbie 2017:91). The significance of the objectives is to inform the researcher in her effort to deliberate on what problem needs to be investigated (Mouton 2022:170). In the context of this study, the researcher also followed this insight seeking to achieve to a larger extent the following objectives:

- To explore and describe the experiences of social workers in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria.
- To explore and describe the challenges faced by social workers in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria.
- To explore and describe the social workers' solutions in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria.

To achieve these overall objectives, the researcher's specific task objectives are elaborated in the following lines:

- To obtain a sample of social workers who are rendering social welfare services to children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria.
- To collect data utilising semi-structured interviews, aided by open-ended questions contained in an interview guide, to explore the experiences of social workers rendering social welfare services to children living on and off the streets.

- To transcribe, sift, sort, and analyse data obtained from social workers according to the seven aspects of qualitative data analysis by Creswell (2016:480).
- To interpret the data and conduct a literature control to verify the data.
- To draw conclusions and make recommendations on the experiences of social workers in rendering prevention services to homeless children.
- To disseminate the research findings in a report form.

In brief, the researcher's general objectives and specific task objectives enabled her to conduct a systematic investigation during fieldwork and when engaging the primary source of information drawn from various platforms of UNISA's library.

## **1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

To generate knowledge of experiences, challenges, and solutions regarding addressing the phenomenon of children living on and off the streets, there was a need for a methodology that the researcher views as a hallmark to achieving the study objectives. In this way, the research methodology finds its meaning and expression from Mouton (2022:61), who states that it focuses on the research process and the kind of tools and procedures to be used. More concretely, Basias (2018:93) link the research methodology with different approaches that have helped the researcher to collect and analyse data, as well as interpret the same data to answer the main research question. The following sub-sections focus on the research approach and research designs that were utilised in the study.

### **1.7.1 Research approach**

The researcher applied the qualitative research approach. The qualitative research approach aims at collecting first-hand knowledge of the social life of the community and allows researchers to observe the everyday life of people while listening to them (Taylor et al 2016:7). It is expected that a researcher studies things in their natural settings, interpreting phenomena in terms of the meanings the participants bring to them (Lichtman 2014:8). The researcher focuses on understanding rather than explaining, with naturalistic observations rather than controlled measurement, with

the subjective exploration of reality from the perspective of an insider as opposed to that of an outsider (Babbie 2017:302). It can be added that the qualitative approach deals with context and a data collection instrument that is sensitive to the underlying meaning when gathering and interpreting the data (Merriam & Tisdell 2015:106).

Given the above views, the researcher also engages Pyo, Lee., Choi, Jang, and Ock, 2023:14) to explore some of the typical characteristics of the qualitative research approach that the present study has relied on:

- The approach should reflect research goals and objectives which are to help a researcher “to discover” and “explore” “new hypotheses or theories” in light of “the meaning of the phenomenon” at hand.
- It is based on active participatory observation in realignment with in-depth interviews or focus groups for data generation.
- It has potential to collect deep and rich data from the fieldwork by engaging study participants through structured or semi-structured interviews.
- Open new fields of research while creating more opportunities to discover more “important topics” that “have not been previously studied” by other researchers.

After developing this understanding, the researcher’s application of qualitative researcher approach was motivated through Creswell (2016:14), as indicated in Chapter Two of this research.

### **1.7.2 Research Paradigm**

This research has benefited from the interpretivism research paradigm by following its philosophical intrinsics oriented to the elements of epistemological-knowledge nature, ontological-nature of reality and then axiology-value and ethics (Manik, Nababan, Sai, Ginting, and Sari, 2024: 336). Talking about a paradigm as concept, the researcher understood that it denotes “... a framework within which theories are built, that fundamentally influences how you see the world, determines your perspective, and shapes your understanding of how things are connected” (Aliyu, Singhry, Adamu, and Abubakar 2015:3). Through this process, the researcher

engaged her qualitative research methodology and theoretical framework together with the approaches while building a realistic picture of social workers' experiences and challenges together with solutions to recurring of children living on and off streets. Further to this application, Babbie (2017:31) links a research paradigm with a model for observation and understanding." Based on the researcher's efforts to constructing knowledge, Yong, Husin, and Kamarudin (2021: 5857) add that researcher paradigm becomes instrumental to minimises biases, helping establish the criteria and research tools required to address the problem. Given that the present research pertains to a particular social problem affecting social workers and children living on and off streets, the researcher has adopted the interpretivism paradigm. The researcher was aware this model stresses a sense of rigor and efforts to collect "findings that are true" (Aliyu, and Singhry at el., 2015:3). Along the lines of dealing with research biases, the interpretivism is incorporated with the research methodology underlining the key fundamentals:

- Study mental, social, cultural phenomena– in an endeavour to understand why people behave in a certain way.
- Grasp the 'meaning' of phenomena
- Describe multiple realities.
- Research to be a process informed by participants.
- Final research report to scrutinised and endorsed by others (Aliyu, and Singhry at el., 2015:3).

### **1.7.3 Research design**

Mouton (2022:59) refer to the research design as a blueprint of how the researcher intends to conduct the study. While its point of departure is the research problem or question, the research design focuses on the logic of the research and looks at its product. Two questions become very important: (1) what kind of study is being planned and what kind of result is aimed at; and (2) what kind of evidence is required to address the research question adequately? (Mouton 2022:61). In view of this direction, the researcher adopted the four elements of the phenomenological, exploratory, descriptive, and contextual designs in her research.

Firstly, the researcher looked at the **phenomenological study** (Creswell 2015:30) through which data were collected from the participants. Thereafter, the data were processed as a composite description of the essence of the experiences of all the individuals in relation to different situations and their daily work experience of preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets. The face-to-face semi-structured interviews were done with eight participants, which helped the researcher gain more insight into the experiences, challenges, and solutions of social workers (participants) who prevent the recurrence of children living on and off the streets.

Secondly, the **exploratory research design** was adopted, seeking to identify factors that are key to the research phenomenon (Flynn & McDermott 2016:88). This research design was very important, as it allowed the researcher to find out what was going on in different CYCCs and how social workers dealt with different situations related to assigned responsibilities. She chose to use the exploratory research design, realising that there was no known research that was done in the CYCC forum of the City of Tshwane, to find out the experiences, challenges, and solutions of social workers involved in rendering services to prevent the recurrence of children living and working on the streets (Flynn & McDermott 2016:88).

Thirdly, the researcher employed the **descriptive research design** with the aim of describing the characteristics (Flynn & McDermott 2016:91) of CYCC social workers. She was able to describe accurately the CYCCs' environment and social workers' experiences, challenges, and solutions in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets, applying semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions and using questioning words such as: who, when, where, what, and how (Babbie 2017:276).

Lastly, the researcher followed the **contextual research design**, making sure to describe the social worker participants without separating them from the context of their work environment (Flynn & McDermott 2016:91), which could have been a limiting factor, to delve into their experiences, challenges, and solutions. With this understanding, the social workers' context therefore included their full-time work at the CYCCs which involves providing day-to-day services to prevent the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane. As already indicated

in Chapter Two, section 2.3.1., since not all CYCCs had social workers, the researcher decided to interview the social auxiliary workers to record their perceptions on social workers' experiences, challenges, and solutions.

The study was also undertaken within the ecosystems theory to describe the setting in which the social welfare services were provided to prevent the recurrence of children living on and off the streets. This also assisted the researcher to describe both the broader socio-cultural context of the study population and the physical context of the study.

#### **1.7.4 Research methods**

In Babbie (2017:117) research methods refer to the systematic and theoretical way the researcher followed to produce a quality research output through qualitative interviews. Looking at a broader understanding of the research process, Creswell (2015:14) recommended that a study should have methods in the form of either a qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods approach. As the authors point out, each of these approaches are instrumental in conducting quality data collection and analysis, as well as proper interpretation. As indicated earlier, this research adopted a qualitative approach and a detailed discussion about this is provided in Chapter Two. Research methods have many applications; they are used to select the research population, sampling techniques, data collection instrument, pilot testing, method of data analysis, data verification, and ethical considerations. The following section focused on the proposed research methods for the study, that is, the research population, sampling, method of data collection, piloting, data analysis, data verification, and ethical considerations.

##### **1.7.4.1 *The research population***

Research population relates to a theoretically specified aggregation of elements from which a sample will be selected in a study (Babbie 2017:202). The concept also refers to a group of individuals who share the same characteristics which the researcher is interested in (Creswell and Guetterman 2021:680). The researcher was guided by this insight to select the study population. The population of the study comprised all social workers rendering social welfare services to prevent the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane, Gauteng Province. According to

the CYCC forum coordinator, who has served as the research gatekeeper, it was noted that there are currently 24 CYCCs in the City of Tshwane, each having one social worker. In total, 24 social workers constituted the population for the study. The researcher only sampled eight participants representing eight CYCCs to achieve her study objectives. It was recorded that the DSD appointed the coordinator to oversee the general operations of the CYCCs, with one of her roles being to convene regular meetings with the social workers and social auxiliary workers to discuss issues related to children living on and off the streets. Since the researcher was unable to achieve the targeted number of eight social workers for the interviews, two social auxiliary workers were included. The research population was then a crucial step for the researcher to study the targeted participants to explore social workers' experiences, challenges, and solutions in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria. Since it was impossible to study all the members of the population (Babbie 2017:117), because of time and resources constraints, the researcher drew a sample from the population, as will be introduced in the next sub-section. Further details regarding the identification of the field research site connected to the population are featured in Chapter Two, section 2.3.1.1.

#### **1.7.4.2 Sample**

Creswell and Guetterman (2021:169) conceptualise “sample” indicating that it is “a subgroup of the target population that the researcher plans to study for generalizing about the target population.” In connection, the task of sampling in qualitative research characterising this present study involves the selection of subjects, locations, groups, and situations to be observed or interviewed (Farrugia 2019:69), (Bouma, Ling and Wilkinson 2012:222). The authors also consider the selection of locations, timeframes, and a point of orientation for observational research to be part of the broader understanding of the sampling exercise. The next sub-section elaborates on the sampling methods that were employed to select the sample.

#### **1.7.4.3 Sampling methods**

The literature review identified probability sampling and non-probability sampling (Babbie 2017:196-199). When utilising probability sampling, the researcher selects

“elements that accurately represent the total population from which the elements were drawn” and “every element in the population has a known probability of being included in the sample” (Wilson 2014:45). In the event that non-probability sampling is used, the researcher is not sure of a “specific element of the population being included in the sample” (Wilson 2014:46). From this angle, the author warns that it “does not permit generalising from the sample to the population because the researcher has no reassurance that the sample is representative of the population” (Wilson 2014:46).

Acknowledging that limitation, the researcher therefore adopted the non-probability and snowball sampling and proceeded by asking the few available individuals to provide the information needed to locate more others. In terms of its usefulness, “snowball” in research implies a “process of accumulation as each located subject suggests other subjects” (Babbie 2017:196). As a result, not all the social workers in the 24 CYCCs around Tshwane were selected to take part in the study (see Chapter Two, section 2.5.2). The researcher worked with the coordinator of the CYCC forum who served as the research gatekeeper to select the participants. In this regard, purposive sampling was used to select the participants. The researcher noted its implications in her research from Campbell, Greenwood, Prior, Shearer, Walkem, Young, Bywaters, and Walker (2020:653). To get a further clarity on this purposeful sampling application, she referred to Babbie (2017:494). She considered the author’s remarks that “the units to be observed are selected of the bases of the researcher’s judgment about which ones will be the most useful or representative-judgemental sampling”

In view of that consensus, purposive sampling has been defined in this study accordingly and the criteria for inclusion and exclusion have been set in the selection of social workers for the interview protocol, as mentioned in Chapter Two, section 2.5. However, the researcher indicates that she has geographically worked with Pretoria CYCCs. Her target of interviewing eight social workers could not be reached; a limitation which resulted in her including two social auxiliary workers to meet the target (see details Chapter Two, section 2.5.2.)

#### **1.7.4.4 Data collection**



The researcher started collecting data only after obtaining the necessary permissions, including the consent of the relevant participants and their employers, for the process to unfold in respect to the research ethics requirement. Barrett and Twycross (2018:63) clarify that data collection refers to a systematic way of gathering information that is relevant to the research process. With this presentation, both the use and implications of data collection task in a given study are reflected in Moser and Korstjens (2018:12). The researcher has noted that the secondary data collections were scholarly generated from the library by consulting the specific body of literature in realignment with the study topic. She subsequently noted that the primary data collection process is linked which in the context of her own study was done through the fieldwork conducted at the CYCCs in Tshwane.

#### **1.7.4.5 *Methods of data collection***

As for the guideline to administer the interviews in the field, Terrell (2016:80) identifies semi-structured interviews and unstructured interviews. Structured and semi-structured are kinds of interviews that work with one-to-one interviews (Barret and Twycross 2018:64). The authors introduce the idea of data collection method with an indication that often-semi-structured interviews are used for the purpose of gaining a widely detailed bigger picture of a participant's beliefs about perceptions or accounts of a particular given topic.

Keeping that explanation in mind, the researcher sensed that the clear data collection method was an ideal principle to discover social workers' experiences, challenges and solutions to children living on and off the streets. In other words, she used the semi-structured interviews, which allowed her researcher to ask probing and follow-up questions aiming to give the participants the clear direction while encouraging them to give more information about the research. To move forward, the researcher followed the guideline which Creswell and Guetterman (2021:194) suggest to ask these questions which in her study context were used to compile the biographical data of the participants:

- What is your age category? A) 20-35 B) 36-50 C) 51-65
- What is your gender group?
- What is your race group?

- What are your highest academic qualifications?
- How many years of experience do you have in the job of preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria?

The following are the main questions:

- Share with me how you render social welfare services to children living on and off the streets.
- What kind of social welfare services do you render to children living on and off the streets?
- Tell me about your experience in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets.
- What are challenges you face in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets.
- What solutions do you suggest to help prevent the recurrence of children living on and off the streets?

The researcher has used different interviewing skills and techniques as presented in Anderson and Kirkpatrick (2015:632). Among these skills the author included introduction of self and establishment of rapport and trust, giving clarification of the topic, open-ended questions and listening throughout without interrupting the participants. Extending on this list, the researcher also thought that probing, analysing, seeking clarity, summarising and paraphrasing, recording and note taking, hearing and observing, encouraging and remembering, body language, and active listening are vital critical in the interview process (Henderson and Mathew-Byrne 2015:6). At the end of each interview, the researcher applied the skills of reviewing, evaluation, and sharing ending feelings and as well as thanking all the participants discussed in a more detailed way in Chapter Two, section 2.10.

#### **1.7.4.6 Role of the researcher**

In the research process, the researcher recognised her active role as clarified by Kiegelmann (2022:76) in the following stipulations:

*The researcher should also be an observer, instructor and activator. Although the purpose is to make the subjects talk about things as openly as possible, the researcher should accept the fact that the subjects will*

*remain silent when certain questions are asked. A sensitive researcher realises and knows how to be careful when it is time to stop "breaking the wall of silence." It is necessary to simply accept the reticence because the research might include something that would be harmful to the subject if it were revealed. Therefore, it is not necessarily possible in a group interview, for instance, to discuss all issues together. The incompleteness of interviews, and thus of interpretations as well, must be identified and accepted as a part of any research process.*

The role of the researcher was associated with the values of openness and sensitivity when dealing with the participants during the investigation process. The researcher was aware of biasness, and this was central. It is Khan (2014:230) who states that "the researchers play a very neutral role as to avoid the biases in data collection and further its interpretation so as to present the unbiased result of the study." Smith and Noble (2014:100) warn researchers that: (1) bias is difficult to eliminate; (2) it occurs at each stage of research process; and (3) it impacts the validity and reliability of the study findings. The researcher took the implications of bias that could arise in the study seriously and her role, as recommended by Smith and Noble (2014:101), is to demonstrate rigor, openness, participant validation, constant comparisons across participant accounts, persistent observation of participants, and independent analysis of the data by other researchers.

#### **1.7.4.7 Piloting**

Before the researcher embarked on the actual task of running the interviews, she launched an initial trial process known as the pilot test. As Ismail, Kinchin, and Edwards (2018:1) explain, piloting in a study is a small-scale research project conducted before the final full-scale project can take place. Through this process, researchers want to test how likely their study should work and therefore decide on how best to conduct the actual research. The authors' guideline in piloting includes to identify a research question with an intent to discover what methods will be best applied to conduct a quality and final study product. Ismail, et al. (2018:1) reiterate that the researcher estimates how much time and resources will be involved and how unforeseen obstacles would be eliminated to meet the objectives of the study. Janghorban, Latifnejad Roudsari and Taghipour (2014:1) contribute as well saying that, fundamental in piloting, is a small-scale study which a researcher conducts initially purporting to assess the feasibility of the main study and this is done through

performing some practices such as interviewing people to refine the road map for the main study. In accordance, the researcher used this time to make an amendment to the research instrument and considered a readjustment in the interview process reflected in Chapter Two, section 2.6. A researcher's reader will notice that piloting was perceived to be an important platform for her to practice how to run successful interviews while also readjusting the interview guiding questions.

Due to time and resource considerations, the researcher planned to use two social workers from the CYCC forum in the piloting exercise to allow maximum time for actual field research. It is important to note that these social workers were not to come back for the actual interview proceedings because they were already selected for testing purpose and were likely to repeat the same information if allowed to return and participate in the actual interviews reported on in Chapter Three.

**1.7.4.8 Actual data collection**

Actual data collection signifies the process through which the interviews took place in the fieldwork site to generate the primary knowledge the researcher relied on to answer the research question and, ultimately, the development of the topic. A review of Creswell and Guetterman (2021:247) led to the adoption of a table representative of actual data collection pathways, as seen below.

**Table 1.4: Actual data collection approach**

<p><b>Observations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gather field notes by conducting an observation as a participant.</li> <li>• Gather field notes by conducting an observation as an observer.</li> <li>• Gather field notes by spending more time as a participant than as an observer.</li> <li>• Gather field notes by spending more time as an observer than as a participant.</li> <li>• Gather field notes first by observing as an “outsider” and then by moving into the setting and observing as an “insider.”</li> </ul>
<p><b>Interviews</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct an unstructured, open-ended interview and take interview notes.</li> <li>• Conduct an unstructured, open-ended interview, audiotape the interview, and transcribe the interview.</li> <li>• Conduct a semi-structured interview, audiotape the interview, and transcribe the interview.</li> <li>• Conduct different types of interviews: e-mail, face-to-face, focus group, online focus group, telephonic.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Documents</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep a journal during the research study.</li> <li>• Have a participant keep a journal or diary during the research study.</li> <li>• Collect personal letters from participants.</li> <li>• Analyse public documents (e.g., official memos, minutes, records, and archival material).</li> <li>• Examine autobiographies and biographies.</li> <li>• Have participants take photographs or videotapes (i.e., photo elicitation).</li> <li>• Conduct chart audits.</li> <li>• Review medical records.</li> </ul>

**Audiovisual Materials**

- Examine physical trace evidence.
- Videotape or film a social situation, individual, or group.
- Examine website pages.
- Collect sounds.
- Collect e-mail or discussion board messages (e.g., Facebook).
- Gather phone text messages.
- Examine favourite possessions or ritual objects.

*Source:* Creswell and Guetterman (2021:247).

To give a clarity, the adjective “actual” added to data collection implies that this big and more highly engaging step is different from the piloting done to practice conducting the interviews and testing the accuracy and relevance of the research questions (see the previous section). The ‘actual’ interviews entail time the researcher spent on site gathering data that became a base upon which the final report was presented in Chapter Three. Creswell’s roadmap has been followed to harness the ideal of participatory observation in the interviews. “To actively observe and take part in the everyday lives and activities of the persons being studied, researchers must actively interact with a certain social group or community. By using this approach, researchers can obtain a comprehensive grasp of the social dynamics, behaviour, and culture of the group they are investigating” (Odogwu 2023:4).

Interviews were conducted in a conversational style, but following the direction of open-ended questions to remain focused on the research topic. All the interviews conducted were semi-structured and used open-ended questions and, besides the mobile smartphone used to record the proceedings, a notepad was used to note personal observations and follow-up questions that required further elaboration or some clarity. The researcher’s interest in documents directed her to programme leaflets, available minutes of meetings, and stakeholder profiles relevant to exploring the breadth of the question: What is the extent of social workers’ experiences, challenges, and possible solutions in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria? Chapter Two, section 2.10.6, offers details on the follow-up interviews. During data processing the researcher came across some valuable statements that, in her mind, required more clarity and elaboration from the participants. She was then compelled to conduct the follow-up interviews with the relevant participants to achieve that goal of clarity to move forward.

#### **1.7.4.9 Data analysis**

The role of data analysis in developing knowledge in respect of the research topic is taken seriously in the existing scholarly publications that address different fields, including social science covering subjects such as social work. Flynn and McDermott (2016:173) briefly state that data analysis is an iterative and reflexive process that begins as data are being collected, rather than after collection has ceased. Sutton and Austin (2015:226) express this idea differently: “Qualitative work requires reflection on the part of researchers, both before and during the research process, as a way of providing context and understanding for readers.” The researcher responds by saying that knowing when data analysis should start to produce a quality report is one question, but determining what tools to use for effective data recording tool is another. The researcher makes this observation because Bhandari (2023:82) introduces such tools in the form of texts, photos, videos, and audios. This insight features in Chapter Two, section 2.11 and immediately an overlap of data collection and analysis is observed while the researcher notes Bhandari’s five steps (to embark on when handling the data analysis process):

- **Step 1 – Organising the collected data**

The researcher understood that, “after collecting qualitative data, the researcher conducts a thematic analysis and present the findings in a literary form, such as a story or a narrative” (Creswell 2015:4). It is noted that the first vital step to harness the data analysis process is to transcribe interviews or retype the fieldnotes. To proceed, Creswell (2015:32) provides more invaluable ideas to consider to organise data in a better way. He includes elements such as the use of computer software, data transcriptions, reading through the data, coding the data, description, developing themes, and interrelating themes. This point caught the researcher’s attention for further reflections in Chapter Two, section 2.3.1.5, where she developed the idea of transcribing data and methods of storing them for safekeeping beyond the analysis phase.

- **Step 2 – A critical review and exploration of data**

The next step suggested by It is about examining the data for patterns or repeated ideas that emerge. According to Creswell (2015:32), this stage also

involves reflexivity which reveals “how the researchers’ experiences and role will influence the interpretation of findings. For further clarity, Flynn and McDermott (2016:185), reviewing data also entails combing through data and identifying groups of key words that appear to be important and relevant to answering the main research question.

- **Step 3 – Developing a data coding system**

The step of coding according to Babbie (2017:338) is “the process of transforming raw data into a standardised form... it involves the logic of conceptualisation and operationalisation.” Creswell and Guetterman (2021:279) provide a more comprehensive explanation saying that the object of coding process involves “making sense of text data, divide it into text or image segments, label the segments with codes, examine codes for overlap and redundancy, and collapse these codes into broad themes.” Recognising the high level of integration, Williams and Moser (2019:45) thinking is consistent to this theory because it is stated that coding enables “collected data to be assembled, categorized, and thematically sorted, providing an organized platform for the construction of meaning.” It also allows “a progressive and verifiable mechanism for establishing codes, their origins, relationships to each other, and integration resulting in themes used to construct meaning” (Williams and Moser 2019:46).

- **Step 4 – Identify recurring themes**

This step helped the researcher “to comprehend the different constitutive parts of data by inspecting relationships between concepts and finding out if there could be any patterns or trends that can be isolated so as form themes in the data” (Muzari, Shava, and Shonhiwa 2022:19). The implications of this step can further be explored looking at Creswell and Guetterman (2021:287), who makes a list of types of themes including ordinary themes, unexpected themes, hard-to-classify themes and major minor themes. Considering that in qualitative research themes are broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea, a recommendation is “to examine themes that emerged during data analysis.” “You subsume minor themes within major

themes and include major themes within broader themes” (Creswell and Guetterman 2021:289). This knowledge became vitally applicable in Chapter Three, Table 3.2, which depicts a set of the key themes, sub-themes, categories, and sub-categories that the researcher has developed in respect to the scholarly recommendations to achieve a better analysis and interpretation of data generated from the field research.

- **Step 5 – Data verification**

When Bhandari worked on his model of data analysis, he left out data verification, but the researcher added it to this research study as a sixth step, believing that it is worth considering based on the role it plays in research to enhance a sense of reliability and validity. Mouton (2022:75) highly recommends that, “you have to ensure that you rigorously check and recheck the reliability of any set of data that will form the basis for your data analysis.” Ahmed (2016:2) defines ways researchers handled data verification looking at four elements. First, researchers should reflect on what the author terms “provenance” to raise questions pertaining to the authenticity of data. Secondly, the researcher needs to pay attention to the “source” to get the necessary details on data, and where specifically data was stored, and who the publisher of that data was. Thirdly, the researcher has to look at the “date” when the data was published. Fourthly, the researcher goes further to look at the “location” where the data is uploaded in case of digital information. In line with these recommendations, the researcher wanted to use the ideas of Anney (2015:276) to shape the methods of data verification for the study. The methods of data verification are credibility, applicability, conformability, neutrality, and reflexivity. These methods are further explored in Chapter Two, section 2.3.1.6.

## **1.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The researcher has extensively reviewed the related literature in an endeavour to comply with research ethics and parameters were set to ensure adherence to academic requirements to produce quality research. Thus, this section shows how the researcher observed research ethics.



### **1.8.1 Informed consent**

As stated earlier, the researcher ensured that all the participants in the study were aware that the process of being engaged in the inquiry was exclusively done in a voluntary capacity (Babbie 2017:70). The researcher refrained from introducing any question or statement appearing to be a manipulation and did not push the participants for a buy-in with the intention of extorting information from them (Babbie 2017:64). It was already declared that to obtain permission to conduct the study, the researcher presented a written request to the CYCC forum coordinator (Addendum 2) who supervises the social workers. Importantly, the researcher has ensured that the consent form (Addendum 3 and 4) for each participant was well written, understandable, accepted, and signed by each participant (Babbie 2017:66).

### **1.8.2 Confidentiality and privacy**

The rules of confidentiality in relation to research ethics were strictly observed with the aim of protecting the identities of all participants. The researcher emphasised this aspect in Addendum 2, 3, 4 and 9. This standard was very clear when Cresswell and Guetterman (2021:175) spells out that “it is very important to protect the privacy and confidentiality of individuals who participate in the study.” For that reason, the researcher was compelled to guarantee confidentiality in the inquiry process and applied the wisdom advocated by Babbie (2017:67), who reiterates that the research participants have the right to privacy and confidentiality. Barsky (2017:5) stipulates that the notion of confidentiality is part of the professional code of conduct. This articulation required the researcher to assure her participants that their information would not be shared with anyone else without their own consent. To safeguard confidentiality and privacy, the researcher requested the social worker participants to avail themselves at their offices located within the CYCCs for interviews.

### **1.8.3 Anonymity**

The researcher respected the right of the participants to anonymity, as clearly mentioned in Addendum 2, 3 and 4. This aspect of research ethics was defined by Mouton (2022:186), who points out that participants have the right to remain anonymous during data collection even when equipment such as cameras, tape recorders, or any other data gathering device, or even face-to-face interviews, are used. In addition to this caution, the right to anonymity in this research was adhered

to by ensuring that the researcher could not link a participant to his or her data (Babbie 2017:67) and ensuring that the participant's identity was not disclosed under any circumstances. Consequently, the current researcher understood that no figures or photographs directly linked to the participants should be appended to the final report without consent and it was for this reason that the final report was presented using the alphabetic letters, as demonstrated in Chapter Two, section 2.13.3, and Chapter Three, section 3.2.

#### **1.8.4 Management of information**

The requirement of the careful management of information to meet the research ethical standard is referenced in Paradice, Freeman, Hao, Lee and Hal (2018:221). It was suggested that information be managed in such a way that the researcher does not invade the participants' privacy. It was for this purpose that the researcher was to protect the intellectual property of individuals, as well as the infrastructure through which the information flowed. Taking this principle seriously, the researcher also learnt that, "honest reporting requires that researchers not falsify data to support a hypothesis" ... "should not create artificial data or attribute quotes to individuals that are accurate, should provide copies of their reports to the participants (Creswell and Guetterman (2021:320). Recognising implications, the researcher was directed to Mouton (2022:98). Consequently, all items used during interviews were to be kept in a safe place and this includes items such as voice note recordings, written notes taken during face-to-face interviews, and any other material with information from the participants. With all these insights, the researcher ensured that both audio information generated during the field research and manuscript report were kept in a safe place with full confidentiality. The researcher believes that her own use of a smartphone in data collection, transfer into the computer system, and printing out hard copies for easy reading and analysis complied with data management guidelines. She was aware of the implications of the irresponsible management of information. In Addendum 2 and 3 the participants were assured that their information would be strictly protected and that all the scripts used would be destroyed at the end of the research process. Those participants who requested to have their own voice note records were given copies.

#### **1.8.5 Debriefing of participants**

The researcher always strived to practice academic integrity, objectivity, and adherence to the highest technical standards when analysing and interpreting the findings. The researcher took this process seriously. Babbie (2017:71) states that participants are entitled to a debriefing session after interviews. In this regard, the researcher prepared a social worker who provided debriefing sessions to participants (Addendums 6 and 7). In addition, the researcher performed the following set of activities in her attempt to perform debriefing at the close of the research project:

- Afford her study participants an opportunity to withdraw their consent to participate or withdraw their data from the study (Thorpe 2014:261).
- Provide them with the study results by asking questions such as:
  - Is there anything in particular that stands out to you about the interviews?
  - In what ways, if any, do you feel your gender/race/culture/class/status/age influenced your thoughts about the interviews?
  - What experiences have you had that you believe impacted your thoughts regarding these interviews? (Weinbaum 2016:252)
- Provide a list of resources they can seek if they become distressed after the study. Clare (Whitney and Evered 2024:7).

## **1.9 CLARIFICATION OF KEY CONCEPTS ARISING FROM THE STUDY**

From the literature review, the researcher noted that it was a matter of common practice in an academic exercise like the present study to point out key concepts. In this section the key concepts have been identified to allow the reader to get an overview of the dissertation in relation to its main theme.

### **1.9.1 Social welfare**

The social welfare system that features in the study was explained drawing on a report by Noyoo (2021:5), “social welfare seeks to mobilise financial resources needed for social workers to intervene on behalf of vulnerable groups.” To make the definition relevant for the experiences of children living on and off the streets, the Child Welfare Information Gateway (2018:1) specifically articulates child welfare from the broader social welfare to promote a continuum of services designed to ensure that all children are safe and that families have the necessary support to care for them successfully.

### **1.9.2 Social welfare services**

A definition of social welfare services was constructed focusing on the problem of meeting social needs and mechanisms for poor people to realise their potential. Social Development Department (2022:5) supports this vision in the following advocating terms:

RISIHA means “resilience” in Xitsonga and is a community-based child protection, prevention and early intervention programme, aimed at protecting orphans and vulnerable children, including those living in child and youth headed households, children with chronic health conditions as well as those living and working on the streets.

The researcher can also supplement the above insights referencing Ogbonna (2017:101) to move forward. It is clarified that social welfare services are practically about volunteers or government agents offering “support, protection, and welfare to disadvantaged people like orphans, handicapped, mentally or chronically ill. It is a major component of health services.”

### **1.9.3 Social work**

Defining social work through the lens of professionalised practice, Martin (2016:3) expects social workers to develop a deep-down sense of social change, problem solving in human relationships, empowerment of the most vulnerable people, and liberating and enhancing human wellbeing. As the author clarifies, this task cannot bear fruits without the linked theories of human behaviour and social systems, as social work should intervene at the point where people interact with their environments. This assumption agrees with the ecosystems theory that addresses children living on and off the streets, as the researcher demonstrated earlier. With reference made to the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), Ornellas (2018:224) records that, social work looks at the ideals of social justice, human rights, social cohesion, collective responsibility, engaging people and structures to address life challenges, humanities, and indigenous knowledge. “Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing” (Ornellas 2018:224).

#### **1.9.4 Children living on and off the streets**

The idea of “children on and off the streets” is alternative language the researcher adopts to express the cycle of street children in the city. This perspective should not be confused with the following definition by Friberg and Martinsson (2017:7):

Street children are further as either ‘on the street’ or ‘of the street’. Children ‘of the street’ live and sleep on the streets in urban areas and streets are their homes, whereas children ‘on the street’ have their homes and only come to the streets to beg for money during the day and return home in the evening.

Following broader lines of “push or pull factors” for children living on and off the streets (Diriba 2015:135), the researcher contributed to the existing knowledge of this field by exploring the cycle of children going back to the streets even after due statutory mandates, in search of a permanent solution to the recurrence of “children on and off the streets.”

This research was undertaken within the broader definition of children living on and off the streets, which Cumber (2015:85) cites highlighting their different abodes as follows:

- Children who have been shown to roam the streets of urban areas begging and looking for jobs in order to obtain food and other basic necessities.
- Children who usually work in poor conditions, dangerous to their health, and starve some days.
- Children who are often found in busy places such as railway stations, bus stations, in front of film or night clubs, with no adult supervision,
- Children who sleep in half-destroyed houses, abandoned basements, under bridges and in the open air.

The researcher noted that the above definition was very similar to information found in the SchoolHouse Connection (2023:50) and was advanced for the purpose of advocacy and policy change to promote the rights of children living on and off the streets.

#### **1.9.5. Rationale**

Referring to Dewasiri, Weerakoon and Azeez (2018:5), the idea of rationale is applicable to an exploratory and descriptive research oriented to a phenomenological study. The authors clarify further that, the concept helps give effect to the research problem, questions and objectives as one is guided to ask what, how and why type of questions. The researcher connects this explanation with Nicholas and Petry, (2018:423) highlighting that a good research manuscript should reflect the rationale as an indication of how the study contributes to the existing knowledge. It is at this point, the researcher made sure that the analysis of her data "...must be presented in a logically consistent manner to convince readers that the rationale and included constructs make sense and are supported. Without clarity and logic, it will be difficult for readers to cite and extend the findings from the work" (Nicholas and Petry 2018:423).

## **1.10. STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY**

The provisional chapters of the dissertation are structured as follows:

- **Chapter One: General introduction and background**

Chapter one of the study offered the general overview, covering key elements such as the research background, the problem statement and the objectives, the methodology, the ecosystems theory, and ethical considerations.

- **Chapter Two: Application of the research methodology**

This chapter describes the qualitative research methodology paradigm that was used to inform the study. It clarifies this by presenting the key components, such as the approach to the research, the design, and the method of data sampling and collection, together with the method of analysis and interpretation.

- **Chapter Three: The field research findings and literature control**

Chapter Three is the heart of the study, as it captures the findings and the theoretical framework applied to achieve the goal. For further development to meet the objectives of the study, the findings are extensively analysed and the

interpretation is enhanced through a dialogue with more insights generated from the literature review in the previous chapter.

- **Chapter Four: Summary, conclusions, and recommendations**

In Chapter Four the reader is provided with an introduction of the executive summary of the main research argument and the general conclusion. Here the researcher also highlights issues for future considerations and recommendations.

The themes needing further research that have not been processed because of time constraints are featured at the end of the research study in Chapter Four.

### **1.11 DISSEMINATION OF THE RESEARCH RESULTS**

Once the research study was completed, its findings were converted into a dissertation in fulfilment of the requirements to obtain a master's degree in Social Work. The findings were also turned into a report and were distributed to people who contributed to the research, including the CYCC forum coordinator and all the social workers who were interviewed. The researcher indicated that she also completed an article for submission, review, and possible publication in an accredited professional journal.

### **1.12 CHAPTER SYNTHESIS**

This introductory chapter was designed with the intent to offer the bigger picture of the dissertation. Regarded as a hallmark for the study, the chapter has presented the preliminary thoughts about the leading topic that was chosen, drawing on both the academic and professional experience of the researcher's work with vulnerable children requiring transformation. In accordance with the research problem, the chapter has introduced the qualitative research paradigm to investigate social workers' experiences, challenges, and solutions in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets. The methodology that helped to develop this knowledge was introduced in this chapter, along with the ecosystem of children living on and off the streets. Technical details explaining how the methodology became operational in data gathering feature in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER TWO: APPLICATION OF THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter covers how the qualitative research methodology was followed to explore the breadth and in-depth knowledge of social workers' experiences, challenges, and solutions in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria. The chapter gives underlying details of the qualitative research design that was fundamental in the researcher's efforts to achieve the main aim and strategic objectives of the study. Mechanisms for data compilation, analysis, and interpretation are developed together with techniques applied to ascertain the validity and reliability of the information. The chapter will bring in the ethical standards considered during the fieldwork activity. It will also reflect on the integration of the key recommendations from the work of Creswell and other relevant scholars and a review will be done in more engaging and reflective ways.

### **2.2 RESEARCH QUESTION, GOAL, AND OBJECTIVES**

As indicated in Chapter One, the study largely adopted qualitative research questions that were well defined together with the main goals and envisaged objectives that were constructed to enrich the study. These invaluable elements were evaluated and applied in the context of the study with due considerations and are discussed in this section.

#### **2.2.1 Research question**

The literature consulted has revealed a consensus among researchers whose contributions reflect how and when a research question should be constructed, while spelling out elements that must not be missing in formulation. Ratan, Anand and Ratan (2019:15) note that a good research question details the problem statement, describes and refines the issue under study, adds focus to the problem statement, guides data collection and analysis, and sets the context of the research. These elements are provided to show how the research question also gives a logic to the study. Lane (2018:1057) suggests that the research question should be defined



before the commencement of the study to identify in advance the appropriate study design. Cresswell (2015:70) adds that the research question is a central question that is followed by sub-questions. The author states, the research question “...typically begins with the words how or what” and “it also focusses on a central phenomenon or idea that the researcher wishes to explore.” Following this guideline, the research sought to ask this question: *What is the extent of social workers’ experiences, challenges, and possible solutions in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria?*

### **2.2.2 Research goal**

Often literature, particularly Pandey and Pandey (2015:9) superimposes the use of research goal with the research aim and sometimes with the purposes to give a broader indication of what the researcher wishes to achieve in the research, “...to find out the truth which is hidden and which has not been discovered as yet” (Pandey and Pandey 2015:9). Incorporated in the research design together with the objectives (PhD Proofreaders 2019:2), the researchers’ preliminary promise to their readers is that they are going to do something. “You use the next two hundred pages or so to follow through on that promise. If you don’t make the promise, the reader won’t understand your follow-through” (PhD Proofreaders 2019: 2). Thus, the researcher felt the need to formulate the research goal in a single concise statement which reads as follows:

- To develop an in-depth understanding of social workers’ experiences, challenges, and solutions in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria.

More meaning and the function of the research goal in explorative qualitative research will be introduced later in this chapter, namely section 2.3, which is dedicated to the development of the research design that the researcher integrated to redirect her readers.

### **2.2.3 Research objectives**

Alongside the research goal setup featured in the dissertation are the research objectives. How and why, they are introduced in the dissertation is reflected in Babbie

(2017:40), Creswell and Guetterman (2021:33). The research objectives help identify the appropriate research design and help specify the data collection procedure together with the corresponding analysis for the data generated. Accordingly, the following are the objectives that informed the study:

- To explore and describe the experiences, challenges, and solutions of social workers in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria.
- To explore and describe the challenges of social workers in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria.
- To explore and describe the social workers' solutions to the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria.

To achieve these overall objectives, the researcher's specific task objectives are elaborated in the following lines:

- To obtain a sample of social workers who are rendering social welfare services to children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria.
- To collect data utilising semi-structured interviews, aided by open-ended questions contained in an interview guide, to explore the experiences of social workers rendering social welfare services to children living on and off the streets.
- To transcribe, sift, sort, and analyse data obtained from social workers according to the seven aspects of qualitative data analysis by Creswell (2016:480).
- To interpret the data and conduct a literature control to verify the data.
- To draw conclusions and make recommendations on the experiences of social workers in rendering prevention services to homeless children.
- To disseminate the research findings in a report form.

#### **2.2.4 Research methodology**

Literature analysis provides an overview underpinning qualitative research methodology guidelines. Mouton (2022: 61) says that research methodology focus:

(1) on the research process and the kind of tools and procedures to be used; (2) on the specific tasks such as data collection, sampling and analysis that have to be conducted during the research process; (3) on the individual steps in the research process and the most “objective” methods and procedures to be employed to achieve valid results. Hammarberg, Kirkman and De Lacey (2016:499) refer to qualitative research methodology entailing (1) ‘small-group discussions’ for investigating beliefs, attitudes, and concepts of normative behaviour; (2) ‘semi-structured interviews’ to seek views on a focused topic or with key informants, for background information or an institutional perspective; (3) ‘in-depth interviews’ to understand a condition, experience, or event from a personal perspective; and (4) ‘analysis of texts and documents’, such as government reports, media articles, websites, or diaries to learn about distributed or private knowledge.

In the context of this current study, these recommendations were recorded as general information for future reference. Only the interviews and the use of secondary sources were applied. As a result, the researcher extensively explored the interaction between the study participants relating their experiences, challenges, and solutions to the problem in focus. The aim was to respond to the predicament portrayed in the recurrence of children living on and off the streets.

### **2.2.5 Research approach**

Given Chapter 1, Section 1.7.1, the researcher has engaged Pyo et al (2023:14) noting the key characteristics of the qualitative research approach which has shaped her study. It emerged that a research approach must have the goals and objectives which helped her explore new hypotheses or theories pertaining to the phenomenon involving her study. It also emerged that the research approach extensively uses active participatory observations aligned to the fieldwork where structured and semi-structured interviews are done involving the participants to collect data. Subsequently, the researcher learnt that with the qualitative research approach, one is able to explore new topics which might have not come to attention of previous researchers.

Keeping in mind this clarity, the researcher wishes to remind her reader the main research question: *What are social workers’ experiences, challenges, and solutions in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets?* This question

was based on whether the environment of social workers involved in CYCCs is enabling them to effectively deliver positive results with sustainable impact related to preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets. Thus, with the qualitative research approach, she extensively explored the breadth of her study looking at Alase (2017:11) presenting the phenomenological approach which allows “for multiple individuals (participants) who experience similar events to tell their stories without any distortions and/or prosecutions.” Here, the author mentions the interpretive phenomenological tradition which has capability “to make sense of the ‘lived experiences’ of the research participants and truly allow the research study to explore the phenomenon that the research is investigating (Alase 2017:11). Importantly, Tuffour (2017:3) recommends that “a modern way of conducting phenomenological research is interpretive phenomenological analysis “because of its commitment to explore, describe, interpret, and situate the participants’ sense making of their experiences.”

Taking note of the above revelations, the researcher applied the interpretive phenomenological approach realising its extensive use by previous researchers. With their recommendations, she effectively managed her fieldwork interviews learning more guidelines from Creswell and Guetterman (2021:256) as follows:

- Identified interviewees by using sampling strategies identified in section 1.7.3.3.
- Determined the type of the interview to use to explore the social workers ‘experiences and challenges about children living on and off streets through a one-on-one interview approach.
- Recorded the interview responses using a mobile smart cellophane but also brief handwritten notes were taken.
- Located a quiet and suitable place for interviews to avoid disturbances and interruptions.
- Obtained consent from interviewees to participate in the research by having each one complete an informed consent form before starting interview process. Introduction of the study purpose, time interview will take, opportunity to ask questions about continuing to take part in the study or to withdraw at

any stage, and debriefing process were all explained before signing the consent forms

- During the interview, the researcher did not stick with the questions; she was flexible to make the conversation flow nicely and productively.
- Used probes to obtain additional information and to clarify points, and as well as to have the interviewees expand on ideas.
- Completed the interviews by thanking the participants and assured them confidentiality and privacy (see sections 1.8.2 and 2.13.2).

### **2.2.6 Research paradigm**

The research paradigm of the interpretivism nature has been integrated to benefit this study. This research feature is also addressed in the introductory Chapter (section 1.7.2) which has attempted to elucidate the context of a research paradigm and interpretivism helping deal with biases arising from research process. In an alignment, previous research shows that “reality consists of people’s subjective experiences of the external world; thus, they may adopt an inter-subjective epistemology and the belief that reality is socially constructed” (Moalosi 2019:58). The interpretivism model helps in providing a detailed qualitative interpretation of lived experiences of people by referring to their context settings (Moalosi 2019:58).

In view of the above understanding, the researcher enhanced her research methodology and design by adopting the interpretivism model to process her fieldwork views on social workers’ experiences and challenges together with solutions to children living on and off streets which in return helped achieve her objectives. To a larger epistemological extent, the researcher kept in her mind the key fundamentals underpinning the interpretivism paradigm:

- Knowledge is based not only on observable phenomena, but also on subjective beliefs, values, reasons, and understandings,
- Knowledge is constructed,
- Knowledge is about the way in which people make meaning in their lives, not just that they make meaning, and what meaning they make” (Aliyu, and Singhry at el., 2015:3).

With the above guideline, the researcher processed her fieldwork data in

collaboration with the body of literature focusing on most recent views addressing the key elements characterising the themes from the research in the local context as indicated in Chapter 1, Table 1.3.

### **2.3 RESEARCH DESIGN**

In designing this study, the researcher consulted Mouton (2022:53). She noted that the term “research design” is used when the study is empirical in nature, meaning that the researcher is planning to collect own primary data to analyse and interpret. This view is expressed differently in Babbie (2017:91) saying, “you need to determine what you’re going to observe and analyse: why and how.” The researcher also noticed that to enhance the coherence of a qualitative research, the research design should address the following key question: “What type of study will be undertaken to provide acceptable answers to the research problem or question?” (Mouton 2022:53).

The researcher understood that the above viewpoints from both sources about research design speak to the research goal and the research question. In section 1.6.2, the goal for this present study was framed to declare the researcher’s intent to *gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences, challenges, and solutions of social workers in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria*. She accordingly attempted to answer the research questions as stated in Chapter One, section 1.6.1. In Chapter One, section 1.7.3, the researcher presented the methods that were used in this study and reflected on how they were applied in different ways. She was cognisant of Hussan (2022:4) and his contribution that the research method “helps understand current issues, builds your credibility, helps you narrow your scope, introduces you to new ideas, helps you reach people...”.

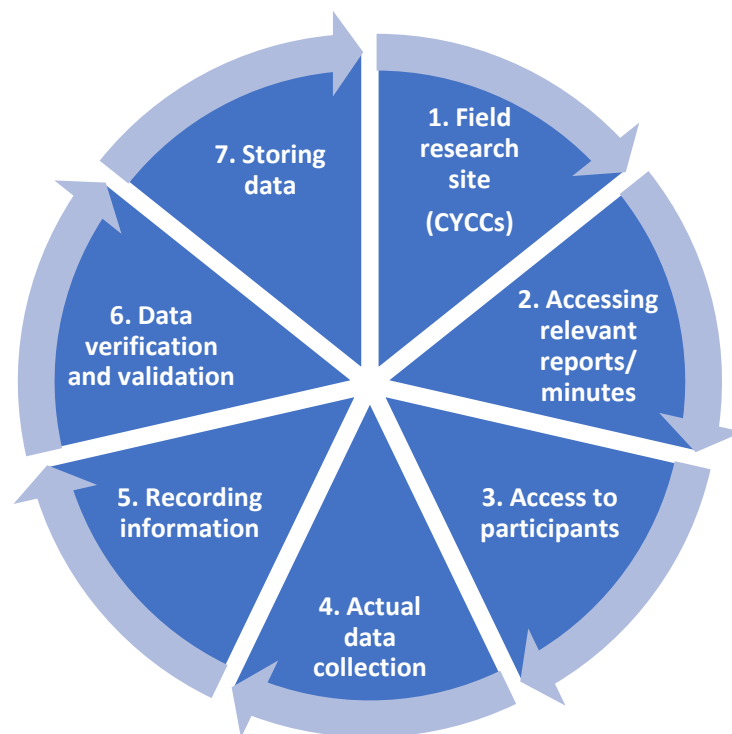
Further to the above insights, the researcher considered the conceptual framework by reflecting on Babbie (2017:91): “First, you must specify as clearly as possible what is it you want to find out. Second, you must determine the best way to do it.” He went on to remind the researcher to be aware of the possible ethical implications of the research design. The researcher applied the ecological systems theoretical framework (see Chapter One, section 1.5), which guided her in reflecting critically on the fieldwork data as she sought to establish the vital elements of accuracy and

reliability in the findings to formulate creatively credible recommendations. She also understood that it would be important to reflect on some of the limitations encountered while analysing and interpreting her data and she noted the details in Chapter Four, section 4.10.

Looking at the overall integration of all the introduced research design elements, the researcher reflected in a more detailed manner on how they have bearing on her field research, as discussed below.

### 2.3.1 Fieldwork

The researcher designed her study to explore a broader understanding of the appropriate fieldwork and pathways to accessing quality data regarding social workers' experiences, challenges, and solutions to the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria. From the researcher's mind, the art of the fieldwork planning is depicted as a cycle of the seven tenets presented in Figure 2.1.



**Figure 2.1: Qualitative data collection circle**

*Adapted using the insights from: Creswell and Guetterman (2021:81-88)*

### **2.3.1.1 Identifying the field research site**

Identifying the appropriate field research site is a defining factor in conducting successful research. Thus, the most suitable site identified as the field to conduct the present research was in City of Tshwane, Gauteng Province. The organisations chosen were 24 CYCCs that have formed a forum and eight of them were sampled. As for the fieldwork preparation, Gajaweera and Johnson (2015:1) were consulted noting the following guidelines:

- *Interest:* the researcher conducted the fieldwork with the selected CYCC social workers that she was interested in, believing that they possess a wealth of knowledge to contribute in terms of their experiences, challenges, and solutions while rendering prevention services to children living on and off the streets. However, she found that not all the CYCCs had appointed social workers. After deliberations, she decided that the social auxiliary workers should be considered in the study because, like social workers, they work directly with children and key stakeholders, notably the DSD and the Children's Court, which was relevant to the study.
- *Accessibility:* It could have been very limiting if the researcher had decided to choose a site situated outside of the City of Tshwane or the province, since it would have created the problem of transport costs. This accessibility recommendation became important to reduce the financial burden, but also to save time and ensure easy physical contact with the respondents. The necessary permissions were secured by directly engaging the management of the CYCCs and the forum coordinator, who served as the gatekeeper.
- *Availability:* It became important to confirm the availability of all the study participants by conducting a site visit to the CYCCs to secure interview appointments with the participants. The visits were made possible through phone calls that the researcher made to each CYCC requesting a meeting to introduce her research project. After confirming their availability, the researcher subsequently approached the CYCC management to request permission to conduct the interviews on site.



- *Language fluency*: The reader will notice from Chapter Three that all the storylines have been recorded in English, which means that all the interviews with the participants were conducted in English. If a request had been made by some participants to use a different language, an arrangement would have been made for an interpreter to accommodate the need. Equally important, a professional translator would have been consulted to render the service of data transcribing.
- *Gatekeepers*: The coordinator for the forum of the CYCCs served as the gatekeeper who connected the researcher to the organisations used for sampling and played another role by helping the researcher establish initial contact with the study participants.

### **2.3.1.2 Access to the relevant written material**

The researcher made efforts to survey pre-existing or official data in the form of the use of books, reports, documents, articles, journals, internet and periodicals in an understanding that “a source of information can be formal or informal” (Kapur 2018:20). In this way she gathered academic books, journals, research reports, and government publications, as well as meeting reports, reflecting the involvement of social workers with children living on and off the streets. The researcher read these documents to establish whether they could shine a light on elements of social workers’ experiences, challenges, and solutions from previous research work.

### **2.3.1.3 Access to the research participants**

The gatekeeper not only played a leading role in the recruitment of the participants, but she also helped access the CYCCs that were used for sampling. After the researcher was introduced to these organisations and to the participants, she started developing a direct relationship with them. Valuing this aspect, she was encouraged by Ezezika (2014:3) that if a relationship begins at the earliest opportunity, a very much needed environment of trust is established. “Your aim in communicating effectively with communities is to build mutual trust and improve the buy-in that will sustain your research project, as well as making the experience as beneficial to the

community as possible” (Ezezika 2014:3). The researcher created an environment of trust with the participants by conducting site visits, making telephone calls to introduce her study, and clearly explaining the study’s academic purpose and how the project would benefit the community. She also explained the research ethics involved following the details provided in Chapter One, section 1.8.

#### **2.3.1.4 Actual data collection**

A face-to-face interview approach to actual data collection was developed acknowledging the role of participatory observations in Chapter One, section 1.7.3.4. With this presentation, the researcher was aware that recording the respondents’ storylines without her own observations would lack an element of creativity to produce quality data. In fact, it made sense for her to engage Robison’s framework which in Alsaawi (2014:153) reflects fourth advantages. Firstly, to “...listen more than to speak” helps obtain rich data, secondly, “to ...put questions in a straightforward, clear and non-threatening way” promotes friendship and cooperation for the interviewees to produce “accurate answers”, and thirdly, to “...eliminate cues minimises interviewees to respond in a particular way, and fourthly the researcher to... “enjoy” the whole situation and to show an interest, respect and humility in developing new knowledge. The researcher then thought that bringing in the guidelines used recently by Monday (2024:17) into the picture would be more operational:

- **Rapport Building:** explains that the researcher was to enhance “the receptiveness of the respondents” by appreciating their opinions.
- **Introduction:** implies that the researcher was to identify herself by giving her full name, while presenting her university research introductory letter to demonstrate the legitimacy of the research she was conducting.
- **Probing:** means that the researcher endeavoured to create an environment stimulating the interviewees to answer all the questions completely without pressure put on them which could have run into a risk of confusions and inaccurate information.
- **Recording:** the researcher arranged proper tools to help her with recoding all the interview proceedings. Prior the interview, she ensured that the mobile smart phoned used was fully charged and functional to its full capacity. She

activated an air-plan mode purporting to block possible incoming calls which could have interrupted the proceedings. She also had a ball pen and noted book which helped jot down the interview highlights whenever it become necessary to do so.

- **Closing:** at the end of the interview, the researcher thanked the interviewees and acknowledged their participation in the study while ensuring to uphold full confidentiality. She also shared her contact details for further correspondences.

The interviews took two months (February- March 2021) to complete and were held on Thursdays during working hours, which was significant in order to observe CYCCs' operations and services to children living on and off the streets. The proceedings involved eight CYCC participants, which included six social workers and two social auxiliary workers. The addresses of the interview sites were not cited in the final report to refrain from breaching research ethics regarding the rules of confidentiality and privacy required to uphold the safety of the children and caregivers. Each interview lasted for about one hour and a half and one participant was interviewed per day, which afforded the researcher enough time to go through the responses without losing momentum. She is positive that the interviews took place in a friendly environment, as a true sense of love and care was felt in the social workers' offices and in the beautifully clean and well-decorated rooms. Children's educational posters on the walls together with reading books on shelves and computers could be seen during the interviews. Placards with children's rights and Christian messages of hope and prayers were impressive in places of care for children living on and off the streets. A tea and coffee service for visitors caught the researcher's attention, further demonstrating the caring environment. However, not all the interview places were impressive, as in some CYCCs she found that social workers were sharing offices with caregivers. She noted that a lack of a separate offices and space for these social workers to engage children with full confidentiality and privacy was a cause for concern. In one CYCC a social auxiliary worker shared an office with the centre manager and they were both present in the office on the day of the interview. Thus, since some questions in the interview required confidentiality, the researcher saw that it was necessary to make a request to take the interviews outside of the offices. And so, the researcher greatly appreciated a warm welcome

and the space offered to conduct the interviews successfully from the initial step of introducing the study to the participants, including the ethical issues involved. She welcomed any research related questions and consent forms were distributed for each participant to sign, while informing them that taking part in the study was not binding. It was therefore made clear that a withdrawal at any stage would be accepted without questioning the concerned individuals and any information that would have been contributed would not be featured in the final report. Permission was also requested to use a mobile smartphone to record the proceedings and options were open for anyone who wanted a copy of their audio record. The rules of confidentiality of the participants were discussed and a decision was made to use an alphabetical code in the place of their names, i.e. Social Worker A (SWA), Social Worker B (SWB), and Social Auxiliary Worker G (SAWG), as further explained in Chapter Three, section 3.2.

It would be remiss of the researcher not to acknowledge her frustrations and courage during the data collection process. The study took place in the era of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, specifically in the middle of the national state of disaster. During this time many businesses and institutions were introducing new systems, including digital migration, to curb this global outbreak. The researcher had to overcome her personal fear of the deadly virus to go on sites and conduct face-to-face interviews, which she thought would be the more effective option than virtual or telephonic interviews. To protect herself and her respondents, before each interview could unfold all the safety measures and protocols were reviewed to ensure full compliance with the use of personal protective equipment and social distancing. As the free movement of people was restricted, the researcher utilised her government permit to perform essential services during the lockdown, which she already had as a social worker. The piloting was not affected, because it was undertaken and completed shortly before the COVID-19 outbreak.

#### ***2.3.1.5 Safe quality recording and transcribing information for analysis purposes***

The recording of data from the interviews was performed using a mobile smartphone voice note recorder, a function that was tested before its use in the interviews. This mode of interview capturing has helped save time that could have been lost trying to

listen and observe while at the same time writing up all the storylines narrated by the participants. The researcher also thought it was more convenient to use the smart mobile phone to send a voice note via WhatsApp to any participant who wished to get a copy of his/her interview recording. As pointed out in Chapter One, section 1.7.3.9, she only wrote down the key highlights of conversations to assist her in the process of probing. Creswell's insights in Chapter One, section 1.7.3.9, was applied and transcribing data to generate a working text was done by using a computer software programme that helped convert and transfer audio information into a Microsoft Word document, making it easier for the researcher to proceed with analysis. Data transfer from the mobile phone to the computer was performed by emailing the voice records to her email account. A software tool (<https://screenap.io>) was utilised to convert the audio information into a Microsoft Word document, which was then printed out for easy reading and analysis.

After conducting all the interviews, the audio transcript was backed up and a copy of the script was stored in a safe place to avoid any potential loss.

#### **2.3.1.6 Data verification and validation**

According to Agarwal (2021:3), data verification is a process that helps researchers make their data accurate, whereas validation implies the correctness of data to be usable in research. Verification and validation approaches were paired to enhance the study's data reliability and applicability. Mouton (2022:75) says, "you have to ensure that you rigorously check and recheck the reliability of any set of data that will form the basis for your data analysis." The checking helps to ensure that "you have an acceptably clean and error-free data set", which helps to avoid discovering major errors during the process of data analysis.

In connection with the advice of checking and rechecking from the beginning of the research, the researcher used piloting information to render the data more valid and reliable. This means that although those social workers who participated in the pilot study were not brought back to participate in the actual interviews, they gave broader information on the topic when they answered the piloting questions, which was interfaced with the actual data analysis and interpretation. As will be presented in Chapter Three, section 3.2.5, the criteria used in sampling ensured that the study

participants had broader knowledge of the field and the main topic in line with Mouton (2017:190) recommendations. This was based on the number of years working with children living on and off the streets in CYCCs and their ability to share the information during the interviews. An additional strategy used for data verification and validation is **triangulation** which “encourages the researcher to develop a report that is both accurate and credible (Creswell Guetterman 2021:297). Practically, after the data collection process from the fieldwork that subsequently led to the analysis and reflections, the researcher critically engaged different scholarly sources from websites and the library in dialogue with the identified themes. Furthermore, the researcher applied an **external audit** strategy that Creswell Guetterman (2021:298) presents, stating that the researchers use external consultants who do not have connection with the study. “The auditor reviews the project and writes or communicates an evaluation of the study.” (Creswell Guetterman 2021:298).

Before submitting the final research report for examination purposes, the researcher gave her draft to a social worker colleague who did not participate in the study and had no connection to the project. The researcher’s colleague read the work and the feedback given helped the researcher in the process of study verification and assuring the validity of the final report.

### **2.3.1.7 Storing data at the end of the research**

The storing of data upon completion of the research formed part of complying with the rules of confidentiality and ethical standards. McCrae and Murray (2018:77) suggest that for studies dealing with extremely sensitive topics, “a researcher might reasonably argue that recruitment would be significantly hindered without assurances that recordings will be immediately destroyed and replaced by anonymized transcripts” at the end of study. The researcher explained to the participants that, where it applies, alphabetic codes will be used instead of names and all the audio records with the scripts will be destroyed upon the final draft of the research.

### **2.3.2 Key dimensions of the research design followed**

The first dimension of the research design applicable in qualitative research is **phenomenological** (Creswell 2015:30) The researcher explored the ecological systems of social workers in relation to the delivery of prevention care services and

the recurrence of children living on and off the streets, applying the phenomenological design. It thus became justifiable to make the design central in this research, drawing on Creswell (2015:30). It was understood and noted that the researcher “identifies a key topic – *called a central phenomenon*- and explores it with open-ended questions to participants.” An example to illustrating further details says that “a central phenomenon might be ‘remaining silent,’ the research might explore what this term means for participants in a business organisation (Creswell 2015:30).

In accordance, the researcher identified eight participants involved in the CYCCs. She conducted the face-to-face interviews (see guiding questions asked in Chapter One, section 1.7.3.5) with the intention of gathering in-depth knowledge on the main topic, which subsequently helped her to draw evidenced-based conclusions and recommendations (see Chapter Four, sections 4.6-4.9)

The second dimension of the design is the **exploratory**, which helped identify factors that are key to the research phenomenon (Flynn & McDermott 2016:88). The researcher used the exploratory research design with the realisation that it is more often utilised “to satisfy the researcher’s curiosity and desire for better understanding” and it is also more “appropriate vehicle to study “a persistent phenomenon” (Babbie 2017:92). In accordance, social workers’ experiences, challenges, and solutions to the recurrence of children living on and off the streets was handled in an exploratory manner. To the researcher’s knowledge, there is no prior research that has been done in the City of Tshwane with the CYCCs, social workers, and children living on and off the streets. She introduced the exploratory dimension to this cause to discover how social workers get along with the situation in which the CYCCs find themselves (Doorsamy 2019:9) while dealing with the issue of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria. As the researcher sought to contribute to the existing knowledge about this topic, data collection was done with the understanding that in exploratory studies it “is typically small scale and in-depth, often drawing on expert sources of data, e.g. people who have direct or lived experience of the issue you are concerned about, for example care about those with dementia, youth homelessness and refugees...” (Flynn & McDermott 2016:88). The researcher considered social workers and social auxiliary workers as a major source of

information to contribute to her study as she was aware that they directly deal with children living on and off streets.

Thirdly, the narrative dimension was decided upon as a fascinating way to shape the study design, since “the narrative inquiry is a form of qualitative research in which the stories themselves become the raw data”, helping the researcher “to learn more about the culture, historical experiences, identity, and lifestyle...” of the participants (Butina 2015:190). In Creswell and Guetterman (2021:571), the narrative approach is about “engaging with participants and working together closely to develop a narrative. That relationship requires attention and brings special considerations such as ensuring that participants is voluntary and protecting the rights.” It further equips researchers in capturing stories in a chronological sequence and incorporating the setting or place of the participants experiences, “...they elicit information about a participant’s experience’s past, present and future” (Creswell and Guetterman 2021:567).

Fourthly, after having some exploratory findings as her foundation, the researcher employed the **descriptive** design, wanting to make an extensive description of the characteristics (Flynn & McDermott 2016:91) of the findings. This description has accurately uncovered the difficult environment social workers rendering prevention care services face within the CYCCs. The description was done using semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions with questioning words such as: who, when, where, what, and how (Babbie 2017:273).

Lastly, the researcher followed the **contextual** research design, making sure to describe social worker participants whose professional experience and challenges find more meaning and expression in the social context (Flynn & McDermott 2016:91). The social workers’ context in this study is associated with social welfare services and the prevention of the recurrence of children living on and off the streets. Social workers introduced are those who are working with vulnerable children through CYCCs. Their context was also considered within the ecological systems theory frame, engaging facts from the fieldwork data generated by interviewing social workers (see Chapter Two, section 2.3.1.4) to explore their experiences, challenges,



and solutions in preventing this recurring problem. This process assisted the researcher to describe both the broader socio-cultural context of the study population and the physical context of the study.

## **2.4 POPULATION**

The concept “population” can be defined as a group of people or elements about whom the researcher wants to draw conclusions (Babbie 2017:202). Population specifically refers to the targeted individuals who share characteristics which the researcher is interested in to develop knowledge of her topic (Creswell and Guetterman 2021:169). In this study, the population is a group of informants constituting 24 CYCC social workers, from which eight were selected to be the study participants. The CYCCs in the City of Tshwane are in the areas of Mamelodi, Soshanguve, Ga-Rankuwa, Winterveld, Hammanskraal, Atteridgeville, Olievenhoutbosch, and the Pretoria CBD. Not all these areas were sampled, as the researcher limited herself to the Pretoria CBD. The researcher must also indicate that the sampling process took place during the COVID-19 lockdown. It was therefore vital for her to abide by government rules and protocols that were put in place to control the transmission of the virus from one individual to another or from one area to another.

## **2.5 SAMPLING METHODS**

As Mouton (2017:117) explains, a sample refers to a small group selected from the bigger group (population). Sampling then, being a process, implies the “target population” and the sampling frame is viewed as a list of the actual cases from which the sample will be drawn to represent the population (Taherdoost 2016:20). Thus, the two widely known sampling methods are probability and non-probability sampling. Whereas the former allows the elements to have an equal opportunity of being selected (Wilson 2014:45; Babbie 2017:200), the latter gives the participants a chance to be selected based on their availability and willingness to take part in the study (Babbie 2017:230). In non-probability sampling it is revealed that the researcher is not sure of a “specific element of the population being included in the sample” (Wilson 2014:46). The author states that, the method “does not permit

generalizing from the sample to the population because the researcher has no reassurance that the sample is representative of the population” (Wilson 2014:46).

Framing the sampling method for the study, the researcher has adopted the convenience sampling method to recruit all the participants. The selection criteria followed was set taking into account the time participants had available on the days of the interviews, as well as their willingness to share information on the topic of the study. In line with purposive sampling (see section 1.7.3.3) the researcher wishes to emphasise that although she relied on the inclusion and exclusion criteria, she also used personal judgment when identifying and selecting the individuals.

### **2.5.1 Technique: probability – multistage sampling**

The first sampling technique known as probability sampling is oriented to “a multistage sampling” with elements of simple random, stratified random, cluster sampling, and systematic sampling (Taherdoost 2016:20). Its primary purpose is to obtain a sample that is representative of the population from which it was taken (Rahman, Tabash, Salamzadeh & Abduli 2022:47). The multistage sampling technique was applicable in sampling the organisations that were used to provide the fieldwork information to benefit this study. The sampling was done referring to Taherdoost (2016:22), who suggests that the area can be divided:

...into a number of geographical regions... some of these regions are chosen at random, and then subdivisions are made, perhaps based on local authority areas. Next, some of these are again chosen at random and then divided into smaller areas, such as towns or cities.

In accordance with this direction, the researcher sampled only the CYCCs that are located in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria (city centre). The selection was made recognising the advantage of sampling the organisations concentrated in the same geographical region as the researcher’s place of work, which “saves time and money” (Taherdoost 2016:22).

The areas situated outside the city (see section 2.4) have been intentionally excluded because of key factors. One of them is financial constraints owing to traveling expenses to visit all these areas. Also, the researcher would have spent more time

in her efforts to engage all the participants working in the different townships with CYCCs. Moreover, as she has mentioned earlier, compliance with the COVID-19 pandemic travelling restrictions was mandatory in the context of stopping infection transmissions from one place to another.

### **2.5.2 Technique: nonprobability – snowball sampling**

Snowballing is the second sampling technique that was selected and applied and features in the same category with “quota”, “judgment”, and “convenience,” all belonging to the category of non-probability sampling (Taherdoost 2016:20). Snowball sampling is also known as accidental sampling or chain referral as it uses a few cases to help locate other cases to take part in the study (Mouton 2017: 196). This is the direction the researcher took to work with the coordinator of the CYCC forum to connect with the 24 social workers from the 24 CYCC facilities. In Chapter One, section 1.7.3.1 it was clarified that the CYCCs in the City of Tshwane have a forum with a coordinator appointed by the DSD. One of the coordinator’s roles is to convene regular meetings with the social workers and social auxiliary workers to debate on the issues of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria. The researcher connected with the coordinator in the forum meetings, as she is a member. Applying the chain-referral process, the researcher approached the coordinator to discuss her study project. With this meeting, the coordinator referred her to a few social workers whom the researcher then contacted to take part in the study. The contacted social workers assisted her to connect with their colleagues from the different CYCCs, which eventually helped the researcher meet the sampling targets. Accordingly, six social workers were selected with two social auxiliary workers added on to meet the targeted number (see Chapter One, section 1.7.2) It is important to note that these social auxiliary workers were recognised in the study with the understanding that they possess information about social workers’ experiences, challenges, and solutions in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets. Their contribution to the bigger inquiry emerged from their face-to-face relationship with vulnerable children living on and off the streets through outreaches in addition to working hand-in-hand with social workers in the CYCCs.

### **2.5.3 Technique: purposeful sampling – inclusion-exclusion criteria**

Other than the multistage and snowballing techniques, purposeful sampling was brought in as the additional technique to shape the research design. Purposeful sampling is the task of identifying and selecting individuals or groups who have knowledge about experienced phenomenon (Creswell and Guetterman 2021:243). To put this theory into practice, Garg (2016:642) suggests the use of “inclusion” criteria to identify the participants in a consistent, reliable, uniform, and objective manner, whereas “exclusion” criteria help eliminate the ineligible participants. To explore social workers’ experiences, challenges, and solutions to the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in depth, the inclusion criteria considered the social workers and social auxiliary workers who daily work with children living on and off the streets. The CYCC social workers and social auxiliary workers who do not directly deal with the children were automatically excluded, as the researcher believed that they did not have first-hand information to enrich the study. The participants’ profiles have been consolidated in Table 3.1.

**Table 2.1: Inclusion and exclusion criteria for the selection of the study participants**

Inclusion	Exclusion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Must be a qualified social worker or social auxiliary worker registered with the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP).</b></li> <li>• <b>Must be a social worker or social auxiliary worker who has at least two years’ experience of working with children living on and off the streets.</b></li> <li>• <b>Must be a social worker or social auxiliary worker who is between the age of 20 and 60.</b></li> <li>• <b>Must be a social worker or social auxiliary worker who is available to participate in the research voluntarily.</b></li> <li>• <b>Must be a social worker or social auxiliary worker who can express views on the topic as consolidated in the interview questionnaire.</b></li> <li>• <b>Must be a social worker or social auxiliary worker who did not participate in the pilot test.</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A social worker or social auxiliary worker who is not registered with the SACSSP.</li> <li>• A social worker or social auxiliary worker who has less than two years’ experience.</li> <li>• A social worker or social auxiliary worker who is retired.</li> <li>• A social worker or social auxiliary worker who is unwilling or unavailable to participate in the research.</li> <li>• A social worker or social auxiliary worker who does not have an understanding of the topic.</li> <li>• A social worker or social auxiliary worker who participated in the pilot test.</li> </ul>

## 2.6 PILOTING

Campbell, Taylor and McGlade (2017:58) claim that piloting should be undertaken with people who are like those from whom you are gathering data. Jong and Jung (2015:33) articulate that piloting is done to help interviewers with procedural matters

including the design of the introduction, the ordering of question sequences, the time constraints, and so on. In other words, “the interviewers can get an opportunity to find out whether the questions designed are ambiguous or confusing to the interviewee, and the experience helps build towards a well-rehearsed format” (Jong and Jung 2015:33).

The researcher launched the pilot test by holding individual interviews with two social workers from the two different CYCCs located in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria. These areas dedicated to sampling purposes were chosen since they fell under the geographical focus of the study and the candidates considered for the pilot test were going to answer the piloting questions. Thus, the reason to undertake the exercise was to test the initial set of questions to ascertain whether they were relevant to their specific experiences and challenges, as well as other key elements of the questions and the topic. The researcher also conducted pilot interviews with two social auxiliary workers from two different CYCCs in the Pretoria CBD that did not have social workers that could be included as participants.

Piloting was done in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, and at this time people were still figuring out how to deal with the new deadly global outbreak. The researcher therefore thought it would be prudent to proceed with the recruitment of the participants through telephonic channels. She got help from the CYCC forum coordinator, who served as the research gatekeeper. Only a few CYCCs were visited to get hold of the participants she could not reach. The actual interviews were held on site in compliance with government regulations set to control the spread of COVID-19 infections. Being a formally registered social worker, the researcher had a government permit to perform essential service during the lockdown and was allowed to visit the CYCCs (see section 1.7.3.1).

The researcher conducted the pilot test by taking each participant through the facts about the study topic and elucidating the envisaged objectives. Looking at Tarrant, Angell, Baker, Boulton, Freeman, Wilkie, Jackson, Wobi and Ketley (2014:10), the researcher attempted to find out how well the questionnaire would work and whether it would allow people to report on the things that are most important to them. The interview with each social worker lasted for one hour and a half and, with their permission, discussions were recorded with a smart cell phone and a paper notebook for analysis thereafter. Revision to the research questions was done based on the

analysis of the piloting outcomes. The researcher was surprised to learn that the questions she initially worked with were not exactly providing as wide a spectrum of information as hoped for to explore social workers' experiences, challenges, and solutions to deal with the recurrence of children living on and off the streets. She realised the focus was more on the side of facts about vulnerable children living on and off the streets themselves. She consequently decided to readjust the questions by looking at the pressing context of social workers and prevention care services to deal with the recurring problem. The overall adjustments to the interview guide were done by recruiting CYCC social auxiliary workers to take part in the interviews, since the researcher became aware that not all the CYCC forum's social workers are involved in outreaches to deal with children living on and off the streets. It also came to the researcher's attention that some CYCCs did not have full-time social workers to deal with the issues of children living on and off the streets. After interviewing the social auxiliary workers during piloting, she was satisfied that the answers were adequately addressing the key elements of the study topic. Their knowledge is developed in various ways, as they attend CYCC forum meetings and work with designated social workers in handling the issues of children living on and off the streets. Table 2.2 below shows the question guide used during the piloting process. It is also important to note that the revised version is presented in section 2.10.7 of this chapter.

**Table 2.2: The pilot test questions**

<b>AREA OF FOCUS</b>	<b>PILOT TEST QUESTIONS</b>
<b>Biological</b>	What is your age group? A) 20-35 B) 36-50 C) 51-65
	What is your gender group?
	What is your race group?
	What are your highest academic qualifications?
<b>Experiences</b>	For how long you have been working with children in this CYCC?
	What kind of prevention services do you render to prevent the recurrence of children living on and off the streets and what are the outcome of these services?
	Tell me about your experiences in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane.
<b>Challenges</b>	What are challenges that you meet in rendering programmes to prevent the recurrence of children living on and off the streets?
	How do you deal with the misconduct of children living on and off the streets?
	Why are families not involved? What measures have you taken to involve the families?
	How do you assist the children to gain self-confidence and not misbehave?
<b>Solutions</b>	What are some of the solutions you suggest to help in the job of preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane?

	What types of social welfare services do you offer to homeless children and what can be done differently?
	What are the success stories that you can share with me that are a result of the prevention services that you rendered to the community?
	What are your suggestions on how to enhance the prevention of homeless children?

## 2.7 QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION

The researcher asked many questions on each single item about the main topic during the interview protocol (Mouton 2022:58; Krysik & Finn 2018:333). The participants signed all the necessary consent forms to express their voluntary commitment to take part in the study. The researcher assured each participant that no personal views or statements would be cited in the dissertation without their permission. Through this exercise, the researcher came to the realisation that protecting the privacy and confidentiality of the informants is something that goes beyond academic compliance. Lessons were learnt along the lines that all people working directly with children living on and off the streets are to be trusted, because it was revealed that some of them are from devastating backgrounds associated with psychological trauma and hurts. These children need an environment where their stories can be processed with full confidentiality. If in one way or another such an environment is not created and maintained, social workers' efforts to scale up prevention care services are seriously compromised, hence the cycle of children living on and off the street continues. This is factually an element identified to be part of social workers' challenges, among others reflected in Chapter Three. Accordingly, the adopted method of primary data collection that informed the research is the semi-structured interview with open-ended questions format.

## 2.8 METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

The researcher employed the interviewing method of data collection, as clearly presented by Monday (2020:15). Referring to Chapter One of this study, 'interview' means a planned interactive process between a researcher and a respondent for the purpose of gathering data about perceptions, meanings, and understandings of the respondent's experience (Campbell et al 2017:50). In view of this definition, the researcher noticed that it would be helpful to use open-ended questions asking what,

when, where, and how to gain good, descriptive data (Monday 2020:16). The researcher consulted Flynn and McDermott (2016:124) to identify three kinds of interviews, namely, structured, unstructured, and semi-structured interviews. Structured interviews provide a limited range of possible responses to questions and also require the researcher to have some pre-existing knowledge on the topic, which would allow her to develop comprehensive questions which do not miss out on key issues. Unstructured interviews are interviews that require significant skill and expertise on top of the skills possessed by social workers and social auxiliary workers. The unstructured interviews have a free-range character that enables very rich and syncretic material to emerge, as the interviewee is encouraged to speak in their own voice and to focus on what is important to them.

Lastly, Flynn and McDermott (2016:127) talk about semi-structured interviews. It is explained that these interviews are useful with exploratory and descriptive studies. In accordance, all the participants were asked to provide data on the same issues, so as to easily compare across participants or measure the extent of responses. The researcher saw that this strategy is more flexible and allows the participants to lead the direction of the interview within the set boundaries. The participants were allowed to present issues that the researcher could not have considered in the research process. This process is represented in Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik (2021:1361) stating that semi-structured interviews often entail having structured questions aimed at addressing the research objective and providing structure and focus to the natural flow of conversation for each unique interview. The scope of this contribution is line with Chapter 2 section 2.10.7 reflecting a set of questions served as guide during the interviews protocol.

In this present research study, the researcher adopted semi-structured interviews to get information from the social workers and social auxiliary workers, as her intention was to gather and compare the different experiences, challenges, and solutions of social workers to prevent the recurrence of children living on and off the streets of Tshwane, Pretoria. The method also allowed the researcher to ask probing and follow-up questions that helped her to give the participants the right direction and ultimately encourage them to give more information about the research topic. The process of data collection followed will be discussed in the next section.



## **2.9 PREPARATION FOR DATA COLLECTION**

The researcher addressed a letter to the coordinator of the CYCC forum to seek permission to conduct the study (see Addendum 2). This letter gave the reason for undertaking the study, its relevance in the field of social work, ethical conduct, and the study's benefits to the community. In this context, the idea of ethical conduct in research was defined in terms of a standard procedure that the researcher must follow to obtain agreement and permission from responsible individuals in positions of authority to conduct the study.

The researcher addressed other letters to the participants (Addendum 3, 4 and 5). These letters gave the necessary details about the study, i.e. reasons why the study was to be conducted, ethical conduct adherence, participant expectations, and method for data collection. Participants were informed that taking part in the study was voluntary and that no reward was involved. They were allowed to withdraw from the process at any stage without giving reasons for such withdrawal. For more details, the researcher provided her telephone number, fax number, and e-mail address.

## **2.10 PREPARATION OF PARTICIPANTS**

The consent forms and participant information sheet identified in Addendum 3, 4 and 9 of the research were part of the data collection preparation and these were given to the participants before the interviews. The forms were intended to assure the participants that they were protected and, according to Creswell (2016:90), these forms were also a tool to address issues that arose from the inquiry process and the exploration of the research topic. Following this direction, Jong and Jung (2015:33) became instrumental, as the researcher used their insights to learn about important elements necessary for the successful data collection such as piloting, establishing good relationships, active listening, time management, data recording methods, the process of data analysis and satisfactory closure. In preparing the study participants, the researcher became aware of her role of integrating all these elements to manage her findings well. She also understood that before the interview process, it was important to ensure that both parties – the interviewees and interviewers – had a

good understanding of the research expectations and processes involved. Once all questions were answered and all details about the interviews were clear, the participants signed the consent forms and then proceeded with face-to-face interviews. It was planned that an interview with each participant would take approximately one hour and 30 minutes until data saturation was reached.

Overall, the researcher applied verbal and nonverbal communication skills in a distinctive fashion while probing, seeking clarity, summarising, listening, and empathising. One of the reasons to introduce these skills was to enhance the accuracy of her interpretation while the participants presented their views on the research topic. The researcher will expand on the implications of each of these skills in the next section.

### **2.10.1 Probing**

Robinson (2023:383) refers to probes as questions or requests that lead the interviewee to give more information about their response. By introducing probing or follow-up questions in her interview, the researcher sought to extend the interviewees' answers through persistent inquiring in a more critical and open-minded way. She did it directly through the 6 ways of probing as presented by (Robinson 2023:384): (1) silent probe, an indication of continuing talking, (2) encouragement prompt, a motivation from interviewer to interviewee, (3) elaboration probe, a sign of elaboration, (4) clarification probe, a request to clarify, (5) recapitulation probe, a sign for the interviewee to restart the story, and (6) the reflective probe that is meant to get more clarification from interviewee.

Importantly, Babbie (2017:275) shows that this process benefited the researcher in that it could lead to further elaboration, as she could recognise red lights in the answer such as unusual terms or intonations which may signal the existence of a rich vein of information.

### **2.10.2 Seeking clarity to understand**

The researcher's idea of "seeking clarity" in each step of the interview process comes from Henderson and Mathew-Byrne (2016:15). The skill was a directive that helped to control the direction and pace of the interview and encouraged social workers to give more details on what they tried to express about their experiences, challenges,

and solutions related to preventing children living on and off the streets. Stofer (2019:2) gave some helpful hints, stating that the interviewer could echo what the participant said and repeat her/his words verbatim, followed by “then what happens/happened?”, to elicit more from a story or a step-by-step explanation.

### **2.10.3 Summarising key facts**

The skill of summarising in the interview protocol was applied in the study. The researcher referred to Henderson and Mathew-Byrne (2016:7) who says that: “summarising can be used throughout an interview and at the end to review the key points of a discussion and to bring a session to a close, by drawing together the main threads of the discussion”

With this insight, it then was important for the researcher to make a succinct summary of information from time to time in the interview to give the informant a mirror of just what has occurred in the interview process.

### **2.10.4 Careful listening to all details**

The skill of listening was also in the researcher’s mind to make her interviews more productive with in-depth findings. She understood that active listening was a structured way of listening and responding to the participants, giving them her full attention. Stofer (2019:3) says that it makes the participant feel that she or he is understood when the interviewer paraphrases and repeat crucial passages or potential areas of confusion. “This involves being alert to both the factual and the emotional content of what is being communicated” (Henderson and Mathew-Byrne 2016:6)

The researcher did not adopt listening skills in her interview process only to get information; she also considered this skill for building relationships and empathy with the study participants (Henderson and Mathew-Byrne 2016:7). Following this line of direction, the researcher refrained from entertaining any activity that could prevent her from carefully listening to social workers throughout the interview process.

### **2.10.5 Empathy**

The researcher has exercised empathy in the interview protocol in a way that she understood and acknowledged the feelings of the participants. She learnt that “it is very important to try to understand what another person is feeling and gain a sense of what it is like to be in their world” (Henderson and Mathew-Byrne 2016:6). In expressing empathy towards the participants, the researcher was also motivated that such empathy is meaningful “the ability to understand people from their frame of reference rather than your own” that results in “an emotional response that is congruent with a view that others are worthy of compassion and respect and have intrinsic worth” (Miller (2019:46). With the above contributions, the researcher was accordingly aware that it was very important to express an interest in all the participant’s ideas and feelings. Some of the skills applied include, becoming sensitive and avoiding judging which boosted trust and motivation for the participants to share their stories freely while helping the researcher deepen her knowledge in social workers’ experiences, challenges, and solutions in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria.

#### **2.10.6 Telephonic interview follow-ups**

This task was performed during the telephonic interview follow-ups with five social workers and social auxiliary workers. This undertaking was in the researcher’s effort to clarify certain crucial information the participants narrated during the actual interviews, since she did not have enough time to probe and get more details at that time. For instance, there was a case of some social workers who mentioned that there are children within the CYCCs displaying suicidal tendencies, while others take kitchen knives or razor blades to cut themselves. The researcher missed the opportunity to ask critical questions about under what circumstances these incidents unfold, as well as details of how social workers personally feel affected and respond appropriately. Thus, a motivation to opt for interview follow-up is from Leahy (2022:785) who also mentions “ethical issues arising after an interview include how the interview material is stored, follow-up communication, and what kinds of permission govern usage of the interview material.” Another motivation is from Flick (2018:240) who recommends “multiple interviews over time” in the place of interview follow-ups, which may also be conducted face-to-face. Their main role is to afford an opportunity for “the interviewer to begin the analysis process and present a preliminary finding to participants to gain feedback as to whether their interpretations

adequately reflect participants viewpoints” (Flick 2018:240). In view of these recommendations, the researcher would have preferred to conduct face-to-face interview follow-ups, but the unprecedented eruption of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown prevented her from doing so and this is how phone calls became an alternative option to make progress.

### 2.10.7 Interview protocol guide

The interview protocol guide, as presented in this section, is the revised version of the pilot test (see Table 2.3). The researcher came up with the questions by applying the input collected from the piloting, which helped redirect the main inquiry. The key biological questions were compiled aiming at collecting personal data from the participants. Toward the end of each interview, the researcher applied the skills of reviewing, evaluation, and sharing ending feelings. Table 2.3 lists the revised questions.

**Table 2.3: The revised interview questions guide based on the pilot test**

<b>INQUIRY FOCUS</b>	<b>QUESTIONS AND PROBES</b>
BIOLOGICAL FOCUS	What is your age category: A) 20-35 B) 36-50 C) 51-65?
	What is your gender group?
	What is your race group?
	What are your highest academic qualifications?
	How many years of experience do you have working in the CYCC trying to prevent the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria?
EXPERIENCES	Tell me more about the available range of services rendered to prevent the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane?
	Where do you get children to be admitted to the CYCC and what are the intake criteria?
	How do you cope with the different behaviours of children living on and off the streets while rendering prevention care services?
	Tell me more about what kind of support you get from community stakeholders to prevent the recurrence of children living on and off the streets?
	What are your experiences to share as a social worker involved in services to prevent the recurrence of children living on and off the streets?
CHALLENGES	Tell me more about some of the underlying challenges faced while rendering services at the centre to prevent the recurrence of children living on and off the streets?
	As a social worker rendering services in a CYCC environment, how do you practically reach out to vulnerable children?
	What kind of practical support do you get from the Department of Social Development to prevent the recurrence of children living on and off streets and can you explain whether it is enough?

	How often do you work with family in the prevention of the recurrence of children living on and off the streets?
	What is the social worker's journey with children who leave the CYCCs and where do they go?
SOLUTIONS	What are your suggestions to better prevent the recurrence of children living on and off the streets?
	What success stories do you have to share regarding the prevention of the recurrence of children living on and off the streets?
	How do you suggest the community here in Pretoria CBD should be involved to stop the recurrence of children living on and off the streets?
	In what other ways could the Department of Social Development be involved for social workers to make a sustainable impact to prevent the problem of the recurrence of children living on and off the streets?
	Do you have any other suggestions for social workers to render effective prevention services to stop the recurrence of children living on and off the streets?

The questions were structured in a way that helped the participants to share their knowledge around their experiences, challenges, and solutions aligned with the delivery of services to prevent the recurrence of children living on and off the streets.

## 2.11 METHODS OF DATA ANALYSIS

The researcher explained her methods of data analysis in consultation with Creswell (2015:14), who starts by listing out different forms of data analysis including basic and advanced data analysis procedures. This discussion is extensively developed in Chapter 1 section 1.7.4.9 in respect with five steps which are well known to Bhandari (2023:82). The researcher wishes to demonstrate her efforts to fine-tune her data analysis methods to make them more operational and engaged in her own context:

In the first step, the researcher undertook to organise the data collected from the fieldwork in a manner that made her conduct a thematic analysis process. This process came about after transcribing interviews from the audio smart phone which was used as one of the main methods for recoding data. Other methods of information capturing e.g. handwritten notes were considered to enrich the analysis process. Consulting Creswell (2015:32), the use of computer software, data transcriptions, reading through the data, coding the data, description, developing themes, and interrelating themes as reflected in Chapter 1, section 1.7.4.9 were helpful in the data analysis and safekeeping of the information.

In the second step of data analysis, the researcher understood the importance of a critical review and exploration of data generated from the fieldwork. As Creswell (2015:32) clarifies, the researcher examined data to establish patterns and some of the repeated ideas. She then felt a need to reflect on her own experience and how it would influence interpretation of findings going forward.

In the third step, the researcher has developed a data coding system which Babbie (2017:338) attributes to a standard way of processing fieldwork data to generate knowledge. It was important to invoke Creswell and Guetterman (2021:279) “making sense of text data, divide it into text or image segments, label the segments with codes, examine codes for overlap and redundancy, and collapse these codes into broad themes.” Williams and Moser (2019:45) became instrumental in that a good coding makes the researcher process collected data in a manner that assembles, categorises while thematically sorting, and providing an organised platform to construct knowledge which ultimately enabled her to track progress.

With the fourth step underpinning the recurring themes, the researcher handled her data exploring the relationships between all the concepts at hand to establish patterns that were to be isolated (Muzari, Shava, and Shonhiwa 2022:19). For further details, Chapter Three, Table 3.2, summarised the key themes, sub-themes, categories, and sub-categories of this entire research project.

Relating further the discussion to the fifth step involving data verification, the researcher realised Bhandari did not include this in his model. By using the data verification method in her study, she was aware of its role to produce more accurate and reliable final results. Mouton (2022:75) was consulted and subsequently engaging herself in rigorous “check and recheck the reliability of any set of data that will form the basis for your data analysis.” She also used Ahmed (2016:2) to critically reflected on the authenticity of collected data and raised questions where it was necessary. She paid more attention to the “source” of information, the date when the data was published and the “location” where the data is located and this process was about primary and secondary sources.

## **2.12 METHODS OF DATA VERIFICATION**

The researcher applied an overarching method to ensure a high level of data validation and accuracy in respect of the values discussed in this section.

### **2.12.1 Credibility of findings**

The researcher ensured that her findings were credible to enhance trustworthiness. She gained insights from Anney (2015:276) who, among other things, stresses genuine representation and interpretation of data in respect of the original views from the study participants. The researcher also understood that for her findings on social workers' experiences, challenges, and solutions to the phenomenon of vulnerable children on and off the streets to be credible, they must be measurable (Terrell 2016:173). She followed this standard looking at Morse (2015:1214), who presents a list of fundamental strategies for determining the trustworthiness of qualitative research, including "a prolonged engagement" with findings, "persistent observation, rich description, peer review..." The researcher applied these strategies in the context of the study and critically reflected on the findings while consulting literature aligned to the CYCC social workers and children living on and off the streets. She presented her final report to a CYCC social worker to verify the facts and research recommendations, seeking to enhance study "credibility" and "dependability" (Morse 2015:1218). The researcher believes the study will inspire future researchers who may have a keen interest in further studying the recurrence of children living on and off streets and prevention care services. Recommendations of possible themes will be proposed in Chapter Four, section 4.9.6.

### **2.12.2 Applicability to ensure the social impact of the study results**

One of the leading objectives driving the study was to ensure that it would hopefully contribute to the context of the CYCCs in the City of Tshwane, identifying experiences and challenges of the social workers involved. To make strides, the researcher again conferred with Anney (2015:275) and Terrell (2016:174), who offer the principle of applicability or transferability. She indicated the extent to which her findings will be relevant and in which way they will offer key learning experiences and future research considerations, based on the real-life, daily experiences of children living on and off



the streets and the implications for social workers struggling to execute prevention care services.

### **2.12.3 Conformability**

The value of conformability was observed as another method of verification of the findings or data and is about the researcher's effort to position herself in the study. Anney (2015:279) calls the exercise 'reflexivity' which is also mentioned in section 2.12.5 to come. By integrating the "reflexivity" principle, the researcher sought to declare her own personal contribution to the study. Linking this exercise with confirmability, Kakar (2023:159) suggests that there should be more efforts to achieve a high level of trustworthiness: "the degree of unbiasedness of the researcher in the research and interpretation process." This insight together with recommendations from Terrell (2016:174-175) show that the researcher did not pursue the study just for her own academic or career ambitions. Above all, the study served as a living report to motivate social workers wanting to journey with children living on and off the streets to pursue their transformation. Thus, the researcher ensured that all the findings are vividly and accurately handled to measure up the experiences, challenges, and solutions as narrated during the interviews and the participants' views were processed in collaboration with the body of literature aligned to this field of the study.

### **2.12.4 Neutrality**

The value of neutrality and its implication to produce quality findings were looked at by asking the following question: "How do we know if the findings come solely from participants and the investigation was not influenced by the bias, motivations or interests of the researchers?" Anney (2015:276). As such, the researcher evaluated different views from social workers and social auxiliary workers in a manner that is relatively balanced and consistent to convince readers of the study's validity and to provide information for those who may be interested in the field of social workers and prevention care services to children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane. Pretoria. Moon, Brewer Januchowski-Hartley, Adams and Blackman (2016:4) suggest properly documenting findings following the academic research procedures and protocol to achieve a level of objectivity. The dangers of not being neutral within qualitative research are discussed in an article called *"The art of not*

*being neutral in qualitative research*” (Skovlund, Mørck & Celosse-Andersen 2023:363). Immediately after the draft became available, in agreement with the researcher’s academic supervisor, the entire project was handed over to the appointed external reviewer to do the technical editing before the final submission of the report for examination purposes.

#### **2.12.5 Reflexivity that defines the researcher’s personal role**

The researcher has processed her findings acknowledging the value of practicing reflexivity to demonstrate a higher level of critical engagement in research taking into considerations her own background, personal values, and experiences to shape the analysis and interpretation of the findings (D’Silva et al 2016: 96). This means that she poisoned herself in the research as an active participant. Peddle (2022: 2908) says that “reflexivity assists researchers to consider their continuing engagement with participants and revelations of the self as the researcher enters the various stages of the research process.” Keeping this declaration in mind and as also indicated in earlier sections, the researcher has undertaken this study being a professional social worker from a CYCC in the City of Tshwane. She considers the study a milestone achievement intended to contribute through personal reflection on her own work to establish the experiences, challenges, and alternative solutions in preventing children from living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria. She also believes its insights and recommendations will hopefully stimulate future researchers who may be interested in taking this study to a different level and focus.

### **2.13 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The researcher has adhered to ethical standards to produce quality study output. The ethical directive was development and applied in respect of the tenets discussed in this section.

#### **2.13.1 Informed consent**

In addition to obtaining consent from the study participants, the researcher made them aware of the process for them to be part of the inquiry. This research practice is consistent with a recommendation Millum and Bromwich (2021:46) make stating

that the participants sign the written consent forms containing “purpose of the research study, the procedures involved, the potential risks and benefits, and a long list of other facts.” It was emphasised that their participation would be solely in a voluntary capacity in all the required stages of the research. After indicating that the process would be open and transparent, the researcher informed the participants that anyone wishing to withdraw from the inquiry at any stage would be allowed to do so, and no reason will be asked. As the researcher continued, it was reiterated that should a participant withdraw, they are given the choice to decide whether the already provided information should be removed or used (Close 2021: 5 of 6).

This directive went in parallel with securing permission from the coordinator of the CYCC forum to do research in their organisation. For more details about all the consent forms, namely how they were used and signed by the participants and the coordinator for the CYCC forum, see Addendum 2, 3 and 4 provided at the end of this dissertation.

### **2.13.2 Confidentiality and privacy**

All views from the social workers and social auxiliary workers who participated in the study were handled with full confidentiality and the researcher sought to respect the privacy and other rights of each study participant (Kamanzi and Romania 2019: 745). She made them aware that a researcher needs to be careful when handling sensitive information about participants (Babbie 2017:67) and pointed out issues such as sensitive stories narrated by children living on and off the streets, as well as the experiences of social workers involved in processing these stories. In accordance, the researcher set the appointments with the participants to have a meeting on a one-to-one basis on the CYCCs’ premises. Meetings were held using the boardrooms that were generously arranged in consultation and approval of the CYCC forum coordinator. In the first meeting, the researcher met five participants. Time was arranged to meet the other three elsewhere, as they thought the offices were not favourable for their confidentiality and privacy. The researcher secured appointments to meet them in their respective homes instead.

### **2.13.3 Anonymity**

In respect of anonymity and Addendums 2, 3 and 4, before starting the inquiry the researcher assured the participants that alphabetic letters would be used in the report

instead of their real names. Adherence to this ethical value comes from Mouton (2022:186) strongly warning researchers that participants have the right to remain anonymous during data collection, even when equipment such as cameras, tape recorders, or any other data gathering device, or even face-to-face interviews, are used. One of the ways the researcher assured her participants that they would be protected was to use the codes SWA, SWB, SWC, SWD and SWE for the social worker participants and SAWG and SAWH for the social auxiliary worker participants. The participants were well informed that their identities would not be disclosed and that their names would not be linked to their views on the topic under investigation.

#### **2.13.4 Management of information**

The management of the filed work information was an important stage the researcher observed to satisfy her participants that their privacy and confidentiality would not be compromised. This process was therefore handled respectfully with a mechanism for data storage upon the completion of the study (see Figure 2.1). The equipment used during the interviews were notably a cell phone audio recorder, a notepad, and the Otter-AI app for transcribing the audio recordings. The researcher assured her participants ahead of the time that all the above records would remain in a safe place until such time as the end of the study when she has finalised the research draft for the last submission and thereafter publication. This insight was vividly backed up through Paradise et al (2018:221), who caution researchers that the intellectual property of their participants, together with the infrastructure through which the information flows, should be protected. Supported by Mouton (2022:98) who advise that such information should be kept confidential for historical record and as a form of quality control.

#### **2.13.5 Debriefing of participants**

In all the steps involved in data gathering from the fieldwork, the researcher constantly strived at all times to practice academic integrity and objectivity in adherence to the highest technical standards to explore social workers' experiences, challenges, and solutions to the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane. This task is evidenced through the debriefing sessions held at the study conclusion. In this regard, the researcher sensed that debriefing was a common practice in the body of literature referring for instance to Allen (2018:5)

showing how “organizations and groups use debriefs for different purposes. These purposes include, but are not limited to, information sharing, performance management, problem-solving, decision making, enhancing group identity, experiential learning...identifying hazards, taking corrective action, establishing psychological safety, and so forth.” To contextualise this point, a researcher leads interactive discussions with individuals or with a group of people reviewing “the simulation experience and provides feedback to the participants” with an intent to promote an “integration of participants’ experiences through reflection...” (Krogh, Bearman, and Nestel, 2016:1).

Following guidance in accordance to Chapter 1 section 1.8.5, the research conducting debriefing sessions with the participants at the close of the research project observed the following issues:

- The researcher has created opportunities for all the participants wishing to withdraw their consent to participate in the study and also to withdraw their statements from the final research report (Thorpe 2014:261).
- She shared the study results while asking the participants these questions:
  - Is there anything in particular that stands out to you about the interviews?
  - In what ways, if any, do you feel your gender/race/culture/class/status/age influenced your thoughts about the interviews?
  - What experiences have you had that you believe impacted your thoughts regarding these interviews? (Weinbaum 2016:252)
- She provided a list of resources the participants can use if they become distressed after the study. Clare (Whitney and Evered 2024:7

Additionally, the researcher cannot forget to report that she also used the debriefing space to present her final findings to the participants to ascertain whether the statements originally captured during the interviews are still the same to avoid the misrepresentation of findings. Lastly, the researcher felt a strong need to find out whether any participant was affected by certain critical issues from the interviews and therefore required immediate referral for counselling. One participant required a referral and was provided with contact details and the name of the organisation. Her distressful experience was because of her inability to cope with overwhelming

responsibilities involved in dealing with 63 children alone without support from key stakeholders, including the management. The researcher has detailed this point in the next chapter.

## **2.15 CHAPTER SYNTHESIS**

This chapter was structured to engender a research design that played a major role in the realisation of the overall objectives of the study. The researcher's undertaking to explore the breadth and depth of social workers' experiences and challenges, as well as alternative solutions to the plight of vulnerable children living on and off the streets, could have become a futile effort without a proper qualitative research design and methodological framework. As for the data compilation process, the participants' views on this inquiry were critically evaluated to a high level where key themes were generated and analysed through the lens of the literature review to address the main argument and recommendations for future change. With this synthesis, the researcher is ready to present the empirical findings in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER THREE: THE FIELD RESEARCH FINDINGS AND LITERATURE CONTROL**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter reports on the findings generated from the fieldwork undertaken within the CYCCs in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria. It becomes a hallmark for the entire dissertation, as it seeks to uncover the key experiences, challenges, and solutions of social workers in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets. The chapter reflects two main divisions. The first division consists of the demographic findings that helped develop more knowledge about the participants and their backgrounds in relation to the broader field of the study and the topic to be explored. The second division reflects the fieldwork findings that help explore the topic: social workers' experiences, challenges, and solutions in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets. The participants' views will be processed collaborating with the literature in the context of the ecosystem of social workers and preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets to enrich the analysis. The reader is reminded that the eight participants are the six social workers and two social auxiliary workers. The alphabetical codes that identify the social workers are associated with each storyline: SWA, SWB, SWC, SWD, SWE, and SWF. The social auxiliary workers are represented by SAWG and SAWH respectively. These codes are used instead of their real names in order to protect their identities.

### **3.2 DEMOGRAPHIC FINDINGS ON THE PARTICIPANTS**

In Table 3.1 the researcher sets out to characterise the participants' gender class, race representation, age group, professional status, and the number of the years of experience working with children living on and off the streets.

**Table 3.1: Demographic representation of the study participants**

Participants	Gender class	Race representation	Age group	Professional status	Years of experience
<b>SWA</b>	Female	Black	b) 36-50	Social worker	10
<b>SWB</b>	Female	White	a) 20-35	Social worker	2
<b>SWC</b>	Female	White	a) 20-35	Social worker	7
<b>SWD</b>	Female	White	c) 51-60	Social worker	20
<b>SWE</b>	Female	Black	b) 36-50	Social worker	2
<b>SWF</b>	Female	Black	a) 20-35	Social worker	4
<b>SAWG</b>	Female	Black	b) 36-50	Social auxiliary worker	6
<b>SAWH</b>	Female	Black	b) 36-50	Social auxiliary worker	10

The sections below demonstrate that the demographic data collected from the study participants are noted in specific terms, showing how useful have they been in both analysis and interpretation of the data findings on the main topic from the fieldwork.

### **3.2.1 Gender distribution of the participants**

The representation of the research study population was all in all eight females. It is worth noting that all the participants being female did not surprise the researcher, as there is current information that social work, among many other professions, is perceived to be of far lesser value and only reserved for women. This observation is elaborated on by Hicks (2015:4), where he prioritises awareness of the implications of gender differentiation and female dominance in social work responsibilities.

The aforementioned observation is elaborated on in Hicks (2015:475) for efforts to prioritise raising awareness of the implications of gender differentiation and female dominance in social work responsibilities. One sees here that social work is in essence portrayed as an odd profession like many other devalued fields associated with social care and support of people with complex problems in the community requiring more collective interventions. For further exploration, Tuffield (2017:1) critically comments that the gender discrepancy is caused by the societal beliefs that “men somehow become emasculated if they express sentiment or engage in meaningful connection.” As a result, social work is a profession regarded as valueless while being despised by men in general. It is in the same way Tuffield (2017:1) continues identifying social work as an industry which pays low salaries despite harsh working conditions and general public ignorance of what it means



to be “a social worker.” Hence the author’s judgment that social work has become a “women’s work.”

Social work is such a vital industry to advancing integrated holistic human wellbeing, but has been discriminatorily devalued and reduced to the scope of a domestic worker’s role. The researcher believes that constructed gender stereotypes in social work practices are real and more questions are to be asked. It is clear from these insights that the social work profession in the South African context has not been developed to attract males. Female dominance is not necessary; women want to display their caring heart, but because the whole industry is associated with the wrong perceptions, caring about the community ends up becoming a female profession that has nothing to do with male counterparts. Hence, the researcher draws attention to gender inequalities still ripe in society, with more women engaged in caregiver jobs while still carrying the burden of being breadwinners in their households. The finding that in nature women are more heavily involved in caring work has, in the researcher’s mind, both psychological and health impacts. For instance, social workers spending more time taking care of children living on and off the streets will find it overwhelming to raise standards in caring for their families, i.e. their children, husbands, and sometimes their own parents, whatever the case may be, to sustain independent living and community connections.

### **3.2.2 Racial distribution of participants**

As for the racial representation in the study, the distribution of the participants was five Blacks and three Whites. A limitation should be noted that other races, such as Indian and Coloured, did not take part in the research. The reason is that these two racial categories were not identified in the organisations selected and it could have been more beneficial for this study project to engage their knowledge. Looking at this limitation, the researcher noted that it has a history. Gregory (2021:17) links the problem with racial discrimination from colonialism, “mapping the symbiotic evolutions of whiteness and social work”, which demonstrate social work to be, “a product and project of whiteness.” It is reported that social work was promoted as a profession suitable to resolve the “poor white” problems, and also the recontinues indicating how discrimination patterns are connected to the apartheid system in terms of social oppression and marginalisation against Black community (Spolander

2021:99). Worth noting is that a significant change came with the democratic government dispensation allowing a complete overhaul of the entire social work/welfare service delivery system. As a result, both social workers Black and their White counterparts are now trained through accredited four-year Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) university degree programmes which must comply with the National Qualification Framework (NQF), as legislated in the South African Qualifications Authority Act. Also, the social work profession in South Africa is partly governed by the Social Service Professions Act and the professional board that governs social work, the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP) (Spolander 2021:100), (Mogorosi and Thabede 2018:6). Although Cornish's (2023:366) research focus does not clearly present a disjuncture in current professional bodies and the racial distribution in professional practices, it does annotate historical signs of inequality and racist tendencies that she failed to question in the strongest terms and the researcher was left with mixed feelings and neutrality in scholarship.

With the above reports and personal observation, it was not in the researcher's focus to navigate the racial terrain and implications in social work service delivery either which should presumably be another interesting research topic. It goes without saying that two participants complained to her that they face mistreatment from their White supervisors. After processing notes, she underlined where the participants raised a concern that seven out of the eight CYCCs are headed by White people, while their boards of directors are also predominantly Whites. Given these complaints and prospects, further research needs to be commissioned in the interest of transformation in the social work profession.

### **3.2.3 Age groups of the participants**

The researcher deemed the integration of the participants' age groups as an integral component to optimally fulfil the overall dissertation objectives. More information about the participants was gathered, which became a fascinating process as the exercise aimed to provide the proper context of the data analysis and a meaningful interpretation of the facts. A range of views was recorded and processed in a systematic way in respect of the characterisation of the age group (20-35, 36-50 and 51-65 years) distribution. The first age group, namely 20 to 35 years, was recorded as the age for many graduate social workers who are still working to gain their

experience and most of them have five years of experience or less. A paper published under “The social work profession: Findings, three years of surveys of new social workers” indicates that most social workers that have at least 6 years’ experience are in the region of 40 years old (Salsberg, Quigley, Richwine, Sliwa, Acquaviva & Wyche 2020:14). The researcher’s findings are not far from these estimates, as she found the 36-50 age grouping to be a category of social workers vested with much more experience. It is worth mentioning that those older than 50 have a considerable amount of rich experience that opens more doors for them to work in managerial positions. While playing a supervisory and leadership role, a seniority status prevents them from having direct encounters with clients within the CYCCs, whereas others become attracted to running their own practices aligned to their aspirations and ambitions.

#### **3.2.4 Professional status of the study participants**

A total number of six study participants were professional social workers. The other two participants were social auxiliary workers. In appreciation, “What you need to know about becoming a social worker” (Social Work and Community Development 2021:1) provided a roadmap to engage the professional status of the study participants. There are three aspects for a professional social worker: a calling to do the work bringing transformation in people’s lives, acquiring a bachelor’s degree in social work, and being registered with the SACSSP (Social Work and Community Development 2021:2). As viewed in the eyes of the SACSSP information sheet, social auxiliary work involves a cluster of activities, but under the guidance of a qualified social worker. Social auxiliary workers become enhancers for social workers to fulfil a mandate of delivering more comprehensive and holistic integrated care support services with realistic positive outcomes. These observations are extracted from Goliath (2018:1), specifying the qualifications for professional social auxiliary workers obtained from Further Education and Training in terms of social auxiliary work that should be equivalent to a National Qualification Framework Level 4 and currently (from 2020 onwards) Level 5.

Training may also be arranged through the SACSSP as a professional body. Along these lines of clarification and direction, it should be pointed out that the six social workers and two social auxiliary workers who participated in the study were qualified

professionals with formal registration with the SACSSP to provide community services.

### **3.2.5 Study participants' years of work experience**

Years of experience in the social work profession were regarded as a unique feature in the study of the participants. The realisation is not to see social work as just a career, but to view it through the lens of a discipline among others intended to change lives of people and to go wider in improving the quality of life of vulnerable individuals, groups, communities, and societies at large (Study Corgi 2021:1). The researcher was aware that it would be a limitation to engage participants with minimal experience journeying with children living on and off the streets. And so, the information they offered would not provide overarching insights to formulate proper conclusive facts and evidence-based recommendations for the study to contribute to existing knowledge.

In appreciation, the eight sampled participants identified themselves as follows:

- One social worker had 20 years of experience working with children.
- One had 10 years of experience working with children.
- Two social workers had seven years of experience working with children.
- Two social workers had two years of experience working with children.
- One social auxiliary worker had already worked with children for 10 years.
- One social auxiliary worker has been working with children for seven years.

The researcher wishes to specifically mention that the social auxiliary workers are well connected with a wealth of information and stories narrating the huge pressure social workers face when dealing with the recurrence of children living on the streets. Their daily interactions were noted, since some of them are employed in the CYCCs as childcare and outreach workers.

### 3.3 REPORT ON KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION

The researcher has structured the findings in relation to homes, streets, CYCCs, and children exiting from CYCC settings. She presented the findings in three themes, 12 sub-themes, 29 categories, and 36 sub-categories to enhance the logical flow of findings on social workers' experiences, challenges, and solutions to the recurrence of children living on and off the streets, hence the introduction of the below representative table.

**Table 3.2: Presentation of themes, sub-themes, categories, and sub-categories**

Themes	Sub-themes	Categories	Sub-categories	
Theme 1: Social workers' experiences of prevention services to children living on and off the streets	<b>Sub-theme 1.1:</b> Social workers' experiences in families	<b>Category 1.1.1:</b> Push factors	<b>Sub-category 1.1.1.1:</b> Dysfunctional families <b>Sub-category 1.1.1.2:</b> Corporal punishment and sexual abuse <b>Sub-category 1.1.1.3:</b> Substance abuse <b>Sub-category 1.1.1.4:</b> Child-headed families	
		<b>Category 1.1.2:</b> Pull factors	<b>Sub-category 1.1.2.1:</b> Peer pressure <b>Sub-category 1.1.2.2:</b> City life attractions	
	<b>Sub-theme 1.2:</b> Social workers' experiences in the street environment	<b>Category 1.2.1:</b> Reasons for being on the streets	<b>Sub-category 1.2.1.1:</b> Abandonment <b>Sub-category 1.2.1.2:</b> Homeless families <b>Sub-category 1.2.1.3:</b> Child trafficking and exploitation	
		<b>Category 1.2.2:</b> The reality of life on the streets	<b>Sub-category 1.2.2.1:</b> Alarming violation of children's rights. <b>Sub-category 1.2.2.2:</b> Unhealthy lifestyle <b>Sub-category 1.2.2.3:</b> Citizens of the street <b>Sub-category 1.2.2.4:</b> Dangerous behaviours	
	<b>Sub-theme 1.3:</b> Social workers' experiences in the CYCCs	<b>Category 1.3.1:</b> Intake of children	<b>Category 1.3.2:</b> Life at the CYCCs	
		<b>Category 1.3.4:</b> Internal and external support to social workers	<b>Sub-category 1.3.4.1:</b> Internal support <b>Sub-category 1.3.4.2:</b> External support	

	<b>Sub-theme 1.4:</b> Social workers' experiences of different ways to exit children from the CYCCs	<b>Category 1.4.1:</b> Children running away from the CYCC	
		<b>Category 1.4.2:</b> Turning 18 years old/ adulthood	
		<b>Category 1.4.3:</b> Adoption	
		<b>Category 1.4.4:</b> Family reunification	
Theme 2: Social workers' challenges related to prevention service delivery to children living on and off the streets	<b>Sub-theme 2.1:</b> Social workers' challenges in the family environment	<b>Category 2.1.1:</b> Lack of joint parenthood	<b>Sub-category 2.1.1.1:</b> DSD <b>Sub-category 2.1.1.2:</b> Parental negligence <b>Sub-category 2.1.1.3:</b> Unrealistic expectations
		<b>Category 2.1.2:</b> Tracing the parental homes of children	
	<b>Sub-theme 2.2:</b> Challenges in the street environment	<b>Category 2.2.1:</b> Undocumented children	
		<b>Category 2.2.2:</b> Dealing with unsupervised children	<b>Sub-category 2.2.2.1:</b> A cycle of on and off the streets <b>Sub-category 2.2.2.2:</b> Dealing with the behaviours of children <b>Sub-category 2.2.2.3:</b> Children living on and off the streets have become the source of family income
		<b>Category 2.3.1:</b> Children's intake	<b>Sub-category 2.3.1.1:</b> Screening process and allocation <b>Sub-category 2.3.1.2:</b> Opening files for children living on and off the streets <b>Sub-category 2.3.1.3:</b> creating an enabling environment for healing <b>Sub-category 2.3.1.4:</b> COVID-19 and lockdown <b>Sub-category 2.3.1.5:</b> Heavy workload
	<b>Sub-theme 2.3:</b> Social workers' challenges in the CYCC environment		

		<b>Category 2.3.2:</b> Internal management support to social workers	<b>Sub-category 2.3.2.1:</b> Safety concerns of social workers <b>Sub-category 2.3.2.2:</b> Debriefing space for social workers
	<b>Sub-theme 2.4:</b> Social workers' challenges related to children exiting from CYCCs	<b>Category 2.4.1:</b> CYCCs are under-resourced	<b>Sub-category 2.4.1.1:</b> Independent living programmes for overage children <b>Sub-category 2.4.1.2:</b> Aftercare services for children reuniting with their families
Theme 3: Social workers' solutions to prevent the recurrence of children living on and off the streets	<b>Sub-theme 3.1:</b> Solutions aligned to families	<b>Category 3.1.1:</b> Family at high risk	
		<b>Category 3.1.2:</b> Early interventions	
	<b>Sub-theme 3.2:</b> Solutions aligned to the street environment	<b>Category 3.2.1:</b> Children living on and off the streets need safety and protection	
		<b>Category 3.2.2:</b> There should be drop-in centres with a range of programmes	
		<b>Category 3.2.3:</b> Social workers need statutory power	
	<b>Sub-theme 3.3:</b> Solutions aligned to the CYCC environment	<b>Category 3.3.1:</b> A review of the current model of intake for children	
		<b>Category 3.3.2:</b> Multidisciplinary team to work in CYCCs	
		<b>Category 3.3.3:</b> Managing heavy caseloads	
	<b>Sub-theme 3.4:</b> Solutions aligned to exiting children from CYCCs	<b>Category 3.4.1:</b> Independent living	<b>Sub-category 3.4.1.1:</b> Longer-term housing <b>Sub-category 3.4.1.2:</b> Skills development <b>Sub-category 3.4.1.3:</b> Mentoring children
<b>Category 3.4.2:</b> Full integration of children		<b>Sub-category 3.4.2.1:</b> Family resilience <b>Sub-category 3.4.2.2:</b> Educational support <b>Sub-category 3.4.2.3:</b> Transitional Service Policy	

Table 3.2 is the researcher's attempt to offer the bigger picture of the findings and the reporting revolves around the threefold element that makes up the research topic, namely social workers' experiences, challenges, and solutions. To create a logical flow in reporting on each theme separately, the researcher wishes to first unpack the narratives on the topic, link them with literature, and end with reflection.

In presenting the table above, the researcher wanted to establish the key leading themes, sub-themes, and categories, together with the sub-categories, addressing concise facts about social workers' experiences, challenges, and solutions to the recurrence of children living on and off the streets, vis-à-vis the home environment, the streets, CYCCs, and the exit process. The outcomes of the data analysis were classified into three main themes generated from the different views obtained by engaging both social workers and social auxiliary workers. As mentioned earlier, each theme has sub-themes, which also reflect categories and sub-categories as detailed in section 3.3 and Table 3.2. In this thematic arrangement order, the reporting commences with the theme of social workers' experiences of prevention services to children living on and off the streets in the environments of homes, streets, CYCCs, and exiting from CYCCs.

### **3.4 THEME 1: SOCIAL WORKERS' EXPERIENCES OF PREVENTION SERVICES TO CHILDREN LIVING ON AND OFF THE STREETS**

This is one of the main themes among others generated from the study findings to answer the topic of the dissertation. The bottom line for the researcher to perform this exercise was to explore in depth the CYCC social workers' experiences of engaging children and parents on the total wellbeing of the child and protection to prevent recurrence on the streets. A question like this was asked as guidance: What are your experiences to share as a social worker involved in services to prevent the recurrence of children living on and off the streets? Semantically, the meaning and interpretation of "experiences" should be read different from "challenges" processed later under a separate theme of the chapter. O'Leary and Tsui (2022:1075) are more specific in clarifying the issues involved and, in their report, it is specified that social workers and social auxiliary workers' experiences sum up professional values and a history of centring clients to shape their practices. Such experiences denote knowledge or



learning experiences acquired from first-hand involvement and exposure to the events, occurrences, or conditions they try to make sense of and from which they try to construct meaning. The experiences are also relational: “both our personal experiences and the necessity to learn and empathize are brought together when the client is involved” (O’Leary & Tsui 2022:1075).

Evaluating the implication of the above insights for the study’s focus, the researcher has divided the views of social workers and social auxiliary workers on the social workers’ experiences according to four sub-themes, namely: (1) experiences of social workers in families, (2) experiences of social workers on the streets, (3) experiences of social workers in CYCCs, and (4) social workers’ experiences of different ways to exit children from the CYCCs.

### **3.4.1 Sub-theme 1.1: Social workers’ experiences in the family environment**

This sub-theme’s aim is to report the findings on social workers’ experiences of children in the family environment setting. The participants’ storylines show that experiences and knowledge developed from visits and outreaches which create space to engage with parents, children, or any other immediate family members having an immediate connection with children. In reporting, the sub-theme develops two categories, namely push factors and pull factors.

#### **3.4.1.1 Category 1.1.1 Push factors**

To clarify the language, the use of push and pull factors has been borrowed from the researcher’s personal reflection on the works of Abekah-Carter, Boateng and Dako-Gyeke (2024:1), whose studies on family dynamics and child wellbeing and vulnerability culminate in push and pull factors with the end result of children living on and off the streets. Quoting Kipyegon, Nyachwaya, Okirigiti and Kipchirchir (2015:4): “Stepparent: some stepparents mistreat children forcing them to run away. Orphaned: some children are forced to find how to make their own ends meet due to loss of both parents. Child born out of wedlock: not accepted by some families...” With this same tool, vulnerability is multiplicity of conditions that place children at a greater risk of being separated from their families and running to the streets. The researcher reports on social workers’ experiences in relation to push factors coming from this background, exploring why children leave their homes to go and stay on the

streets in a recurring fashion. To profile this report, four sub-categories have been identified: (1) dysfunctional families, (2) corporal punishment and sexual abuse, (3) substance abuse, and (4) child-headed families.

### ***Sub-category 1.1.1.1: Dysfunctional families***

One of the things that social workers explain that they experience when working with children living on and off the streets is that some of their families are dysfunctional, which makes them flee their homes. The participants have presented the following views:

***SAWH:*** *For other children, there is no family that can take responsibility of the child. The mother and father [are] divorced or separated, the one who got the custody over the child does not take care of her or him, and the child end up on street... so what do you think should come next? Street life...*

***SAWG:*** *I think most of time it's the background. When a child is coming from a very difficult background, like in a broken family, or alcoholic parents, or abusive family, you know the trauma that they have been through, and where they have been raised. The upbringing of a child is not the same, because some of the children are coming from families where they believe in this and that...*

***SWF:*** *...we took him home to his mother, so when we got there, the shack was as big as a toilet, the conditions were just bad, and his mother was alcoholic, and taking the child home every holiday, we take him with food. And it was sad because on a few occasions when we took him home the mother would not be there despite our appointments.*

A common denominator from the participants' storylines is the manifestation of dysfunctional families and crises in household affairs. Assessing the whole situation, children whose parents are involved in a divorce are likely to lose a home and space to play and grow up in a steady, peaceful environment. Numerous published reports support these findings, alerting the public that the situation is already out of hand, making researchers conclude that family dysfunctionality is entrenched in society, resulting in the suffering of children. More examples describing the entrenchment are

mentioned in Kipyegon, Nyachwaya, Okirigiti and Kipchirchir (2015:12). The number of children living on the streets is believed to be rising steeply in the absence of interventions to stop the problem of the vulnerability of children.

The DSD gives hope by exploring the recent government undertaking to revise the White Paper on Families in South Africa (2021:180-181) after numerous alarming reports on dysfunctional family rates. Pledges were made indicating how the DSD was going to turn around the situation. Some of the directives put in place include caregiving, cash transfers, working with civil society organisations, family policy, family preservation services, family resilience, family strengthening, family support, healthy family, social cohesion, social insurance, intergenerational solidarity, and social protection.

By contrast, Ncube (2015:27-29) expose the government's weakness and failure to respond to dysfunctional families; poor parenting skills; fathers deserting children; drunken parents pushing children out of homes; verbal, emotional, physical, and psychological abuse; family conflicts; and poverty and financial distress. "In some instances, the father would beat the mother in front of the child, who in turn would be unable to stand her being humiliated" (Ncube 2015:28).

Recognising the above approach, the researcher agrees with Aptekar and Stoecklin (2014:18) that vulnerable children from the family environment of dysfunctionality without interventions are deeply exposed to a life of living on and off the streets. Notwithstanding, each case of a vulnerable child from the background of living on and off the streets has a unique family history that must be taken into serious account to address the status quo.

#### ***Sub-category 1.1.1.2: Corporal punishment and sexual abuse***

Reports from the social workers assigned to work with the children in their respective families have confirmed to the researcher that corporal punishment together with sexual abuse are happening in the households. Three participants have reported such practices as follows:

**SAWH:** *Like for some there is abuse at home. Maybe let me say the uncle, there are some uncles and stepfathers who abuse them sexually and their mothers pretend not to know about it, or mothers blame their own children instead of dealing with their own brothers. Sometimes the abuse is physical. The child is always being battered by the father or mother or even uncle and older siblings. In many cases those children leave their homes looking for better living conditions.*

**SWA:** *They [the parents] do not know how important the love of a parent is to a child. A child ends up being frustrated and thinking of leaving home, thinking that maybe she or he is going to find a good love outside or on the street.*

**SWF:** *The time I worked with him, he was about 11 or 12 years, you could see bruises on his body, from cigarettes burns, from burns, he had to... you know, he was really abused. He first became a child on street, and then a child in the shelter. That he had to stay in a shelter permanently.*

The participants are not mentioning issues that are not known to the public, as their claims are backed up by previous credible research. Bower, Hindle, Tan and Van den Berg (2015:1), associated with Save Children and the Justice Department, concluded a study on corporal punishment taking place in South African homes and was surprised to come across the following cultural practices that damage the self-image of children:

- It is acceptable to impose your will on someone else if you are more powerful than they are.
- Children have no say or rights or dignity.
- Bigger, stronger people are entitled to hurt those who are smaller and weaker.
- Love and hurt are somehow linked.

Going further to support social workers' revelations, Bower et al (2015:1) and Utter (2020:1) report on incidents of heavy-handed tactics including "beating" applied in the name of disciplining children, which becomes a violation of fundamental rights to human dignity. Responding to the participants' observations, the researcher brings in Ncube (2015:28), who is overwhelmed because punishment levied against children

is intended to uproot them and the end results are persistent fears to live in homes without reassurance. Clearly, children who grow up in an environment of fear because of psychological and physical harm, feel that living on and off the streets is their only option. One can deduce that once they have grown up and become adults, children raised in a culture of abuse of any sort are likely to pass it on to the next generation, translating into violence in the community. Thus, the findings regarding the antisocial issues of corporal punishment and sexual abuse in the home environment are vitally important to report on. To a significant extent the findings represent the microsystem at the centre of the ecological systems framework teaching that the home environment remains a high priority to nurture children in the context of Chapter One, section 1.5.1. One can clearly see that, in general, advocates of children's rights attempt to end antisocial behaviours in schools are affirmed, but they can only achieve more results by consolidating their efforts to target the home environment, which is regarded as the major sponsoring agent.

### ***Sub-category 1.1.1.3: Substance abuse***

Social worker participants expressed a concern linked to the prevalence of substance abuse by children in households. Parents who are not able to handle the situation of their children living with substance addictions push them out of the home. A participant who shared this knowledge was recorded as saying the following:

***SWD:*** ...when you go home to talk to their parents you find them with different opinions. Sometimes they are not sure how they will handle the child who is addicted to nyaope<sup>2</sup>. Other parents have made up their minds not to allow these children home because they steal everything in the house and sometimes from neighbours to get money to buy drugs. The only prevention method we use is to find a rehabilitation centre for the child and start doing family talks with parents and the community so that when the child is back from rehabilitation [he/she] will be accepted back home.

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<sup>2</sup> Nyaope (also called Whoonga) is one of the cheapest, most widespread and dangerous addictive substances in South Africa. The drug emerged between 2000 and 2006 in the Tshwane townships of Mamelodi, Atteridgeville, and Soshanguve (Makgoko & Mofokeng 2020).

Another way that children get affected by substance abuse that was recorded by social workers is when parents are alcohol or drug addicts and have no interest in their own children, which may make children run away from home to go and stay on the streets, sometimes looking for food and other means of survival. The following is the statement that was recorded:

*SWA: There is also lack of parenthood, you find that the other parent does not know how to raise children. They may be at home selling drugs and alcohol, and you find they don't have time at all for their children...*

Locating the social worker's report in the context of health and psychological implications for children, Mabouopda, Toguem, Noche, Eyoum, Djemo, (2022:10) argue that the problem is in its nature serious and complex. It is about a failure to stop the use of harmful and hazardous psychoactive substances, including alcohol and illicit drugs in the form of marijuana, sedatives, cannabis, cocaine, inhalants, hallucinogens tobacco among others. Ncube (2015:28) shares that when parents are also involved in drug abuse, gross irresponsibility and negligence is unleashed, resulting in the child's suffering. A study done in the United State of America (Hiller and Smith 2021:16) concluded that "persistent drug abuse compromises the body immune system, for this reason raising the threat of disease and infection." The authors recommended that "the government need to bring up new strategies and procedures to manage the drugs in the area and sensitized young people regarding the repercussions of using drugs at childhood which adversely influence them in future" (Smith and Hiller 2021:16). All these elaborations are provided for the researcher to expand on social workers' discovery of drug entrapments in families and how they destroy the self-image of children and their ability to build their own wellbeing and a prosperous future.

#### ***Sub-category 1.1.1.4: Child-headed families***

Identification of knowledge about child-headed families the social workers reported on in their family assessments brought into the researcher's mind how deep the disjuncture in families is when it comes to preserving future generations. A manifestation of this dilemma is children living alone in homes looking after one

another and without the required basic means to take care of themselves. The participants discussed this matter with the researcher saying the following:

**SWA:** *There is child-headed home... the parents have died, children remained alone, as you know the stage, we are faced with this pandemic called HIV and AIDS, also COVID-19 worsened the situation.*

**SAWH:** *For others, their parents passed away, you see, they failed to live in the house alone, then they came to the street.*

The environment of child-headed families the participants spoke about is critical and complex and has a reference for further development. The reviewed ecological systems framework oriented to the mesosystem in Chapter One, section 1.5.2, is based on the coordination and connection of social and economic structures. It also talks about a high level of interaction between two or more systems, e.g. churches and schools, to journey with children. The general environment of child-headed families is defined and characterised by Lobi and Kheswa (2017:98), who refer to it as children up to 18 years of age mostly young girls that are living alone in households without the necessary means to support themselves. The psychological implications they report on involves a lack of ability to adjust when it comes to parental duties and responsibilities of taking care of the households. The task of decision-making regarding family affairs and provision for the physical, social, and emotional needs of other children in the house are based on that status of children requiring parental support to develop. Further issues that child-headed families endure are real and Pillay (2016:2) state that they range from poor school performance which may lead to dropouts, inaccessibility to health care, starvation, hunger and malnutrition, sexual exploitation of girls together with other various forms of abuse causing suffering in child-headed families. A worrisome situation from the existing research is that the problem is worsening while estimating that in the year 2019 alone there were about 26,000 children living in child-only households across South Africa (Hall 2023:2).

In view of all the above deliberations, the researcher believes social workers involved in family visits play such an important role in detecting circumstances surrounding vulnerable children. Their

ongoing engagements as community frontrunners help social workers uncover knowledge around cultural, political, and economic circumstances and risks in child-headed families. This experience is in line with the macrosystem framework presented in Chapter One, section 1.5.4.

### **3.4.1.2 Category 1.1.2: Pull factors**

Introducing the pull factors, social workers have identified attractions that make children choose life on the street, leaving their families. The researcher identified two sub-categories for this category: (1) peer pressure and (2) city life attractions.

#### ***Sub-category 1.1.2.1: Peer pressure***

In their explanations, social workers confirmed to the researcher that children influence each other to go to the city where they believe there is a better life as compared to their respective homes located in townships. Having been deceived about the life awaiting them, what follows immediately after arrival in the city is facing the harsh realities and sheer consequences, as reflected in the interview notes:

***SAWH:*** Normally children in townships are always together. They like to influence each other as friends and at the same time they want to connect with other friends living far from them, mostly those who live in cities. When you engage their parents, they tell you that their children ran away from home to look for jobs in the city. Even when they came back home, they want to go back, and one cannot stop them as they are used to that kind of life.

***SWF:*** So, there was one boy, and I think he has been on streets for two weeks before outreach workers found him a shelter to stay. I now remember, he was from Diepsloot area. He went to Johannesburg following other children. Very intelligent young child. Came to the shelter, he was brought in by outreach workers who found him with nothing, including clothes to dress himself, you could tell ...

Considering the study findings, in the context of Ghana particularly in Accra, Abekah-Carter, Boateng and Dako-Gyeke (2024:5) report that some children resorted to street life due to persuasion from their peers. Their study “participants



shared that they were engaged in life on the streets because their peers convinced them that it was an ideal place where one could enhance his or her quality of life.” A research study on the behaviours of the peer children, including adolescents, concluded by Foster, Horwitz, Thomas, Opperman, Gipson, Burnside, Stone and King (2017:3) defining children’s critical behaviours, including elements of a lack of social connectedness which led to consequential feelings of social isolation and rejection. For the authors, “it is clear that youth with social challenges are at elevated risk for a variety of behavioral and emotional health conditions” (Foster et, al 2017:4).

As stated by Ncube (2015:26), children of the same age tend to influence each other to adopt certain behaviours. The results are that if the individual under pressure refuses to join in, they feel isolated and thus submit, perhaps to avoid disappointing a friend or schoolmate.

From the above comments and analysis, social workers’ knowledge of the negative influence of peer pressure on children are self-evident. Their views demonstrate that the social work profession must conduct proper family assessments in the community to determine the negative influences of peer pressure, considered as a pull factor, that encourage children to leave their homes to face the hardships of a recurring life on the streets.

#### ***Sub-category 1.1.2.2: City life attractions***

City life attractions was assessed and defined as a pull factor not to be overlooked during the interviews. The social workers gave good examples, referring to the dire circumstances of misery children face amid family impoverishment and the inability of parents to cope with the situation. Children end up developing ideas in their minds that there are more opportunities elsewhere, notably the city, to earn money and become more independent with a possibility to support their families. The problem is not only limited to those aspects of family needs. The participants have also demonstrated scenarios of children from relatively stable families who get pulled into the city lifestyle just to enjoy themselves and have the freedom they lack whilst in their homes, as addressed in the following paragraphs:

**SWF:** ...but as children come here to the city, the city looks for them very nice as they compare the situation back home, and they end up staying in the streets. Even when they happen to go home, they again come back, and circle continues...

**SAWH:** ...the other difficult issue is, many of [the] children we work with on [the] streets are involved in a lot of issues such as abusing substances, and in fact streets are open places they easily access substances they sell to sustain themselves... money that comes into their hands is spent for that purpose, which then becomes their lifestyle, and they recruit other kids to join them.

The findings correspond with another study done about 12 years ago in Pretoria which underlined how city life attracts adolescents to leave their homes. Profiling Van Blerk's report, Musabyimana (2018:26) indicates that "the pull factors for running away from home are the attractiveness of living in cities, the hope of improving their living conditions, and independence."

The above findings also have similarities with different research done in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, where Ncube (2015:74) reports on children who are going to live on city streets because they imagined the better life they will find there, including jobs, richness, self-development, better shelter, and the like.

### **3.4.2 Sub-theme 1.2: Social workers' experiences in the street environment**

The previous sub-theme dealt with the experiences of social workers in the family environment, which brought out knowledge about push and pull factors in relation to children living on and off the streets. Social workers and social auxiliary workers who have provided this knowledge do work with children on the streets and in the family setting. So, this section is an extension intended to report on further exploration that profiles social workers' experiences in the street environment. Reporting reflects two categories: (1) reasons for being on the streets and (2) the reality of life on the streets.

#### **3.4.2.1 Category 1.2.1: Reasons for being on the streets**

As described by the social workers and social auxiliary workers, the reasons why children are seen living on and off the streets and other undignified places in the city are diverse and depend on what made them leave their homes in terms of push and

pull factors. In the first sub-category developing the issue of child abandonment, the participants' storylines show that they have first-hand information. This category reflects three sub-categories: (1) abandonment, (2) homeless families, and (3) child trafficking and exploitation.

### ***Sub-category 1.2.1.1: Abandonment***

The study participants reported that children are on the streets after they were abandoned by their relatives who are not able to take care of them and who thought that it would be better to leave them on the streets without knowing about any further development in the child's life. The analysis of the following observations can give a bigger picture of child abandonment on the street and how it takes place:

**SWA:** *Not... you know... I can say it's indirectly, because we have two children who were found on streets by the police. But if, ...if, ...if you read the report, they went to the streets with their mom, and mom left them to where we don't know, leaving them with their aunty or sister, something like that. I don't remember well. And the sister got tired because she didn't have the means of supporting the children... so she ended up leaving them on the streets and that is where the police found them.*

**SAWH:** *...We found the boy on street... according to the doctor, he was nine years old... we tried to make a follow up and discovered that his mother died three years ago... and left him like that. Unfortunately, he does not remember anything about his mother. He speaks English and so he does not know his mother-tongue, which makes it difficult to know where he is from.*

Abandoning children on the streets in South Africa is on the rise, which has caught the eye of the public. Interested individuals who reported the matter to the media have also defined how child abandonment on the street unfolds, which gives more clarity to the above participants' reports. As Oosthuizen-Erasmus and Adlem (2022:310) engage the media report by Vorster from *Daily Maverick news online*, it is shockingly revealed that by the beginning of June 2020, baby homes reported an intake of 58 abandoned babies over the first two months of lockdown. Media reports for the same time (as well as June and early July) detail 50 abandonments – mostly babies – found in sewerage pipes, in the open veld, in rubbish dumps, in shallow

graves, in buckets, on the street, outside homes and, most tragically, in a dustbin a few meters away from a baby saver. Two-thirds (32) of these children were found dead (Oosthuizen-Erasmus and Adlem (2022:311)).

Both the study participants' stories and the public report stress that the abandonment of children is critically an issue that is growing beyond control, while the researcher believes that these children are growing up on the streets without knowledge of their biological relatives and next of kin. Even at the researcher's own workplace she comes across many of these cases of abandonment. The police patrollers responsible for public order in the city bring children they picked up from the streets to their CYCCs and no home background is linked to those children who cannot even speak for themselves. The result is a stressful process to trace the homes or origins of the kids to achieve the goal of family reunification and reintegration.

#### ***Sub-category 1.2.1.2: Homeless families***

Social workers reported to the researcher that there are cases of children living with their parents on the streets for many years. They continued saying that some of the children stay with their mothers only, whereas others live there with both parents as follows:

***SAWH:*** *You find families on the streets, being homeless. Father, mother, and children. Even if you want to help them by taking children to CYCC, they don't want. Some of them... they love their kids. They know they are suffering; they don't have food, but the kids will eat whatever they are eating.*

***SAWG:*** *Especially those children who live with their parents on streets... you find a school for them; they go only few weeks and then their parents make them give up. Parents will tell you that they do not need a shelter and they don't want their children to be separated from them and we don't have family shelters in Pretoria... remember those kids are used by parents to beg money...*

The DSD (2021:180) provides a revised definition of homelessness and included families in the new version, acknowledging a limitation in reconstructing the definition: "...the concept is a complex term... may be defined by the patterns of time that

individuals or families spend being without, or outside of, conventional shelters or housing and may be temporary, episodic (over a short period), or chronic...”

Laing, McWhirter, Templeton and Hannah-Russell (2018:68) who also researched the same problem of families, children, and homelessness, respond by using the theory of change. In view, while working with schools, a family is a critical microsystem that should play a nurturing role in the life of every child. It can be observed that, a failure to fulfil this obligation has a catastrophic impact, as children are subjected to risky behaviours such as substance abuse, violence, begging, and stealing, among others.

### ***Sub-category 1.2.1.3: Child trafficking and exploitation***

A sub-category of children affected by trafficking and exploitation was also reported during the interviews with social workers. In the interest of this study, the storylines describing the participants' knowledge in that area are captured referring to the age groups of the children to be more specific.

***SAWH:*** ...we find that on almost each robot are women begging with children. Those kids are as young as from few months until 13 or 14 years old. What you don't know is that most of those children are not their own children! They hire them! ...they pay R50 per day per child. Because using children in begging works. You will also find that those children were brought from Zimbabwe or Mozambique with a promise that they are coming to study...

***SWA:*** ...every morning the mother would wake the boy up to go to beg money on street. Even Saturday and Sunday the child was not resting. All the money he got, he will go and give it to her mother. Imagine being trafficked by your own mother!

***SWF:*** ...the mother will tell you straight, “I don't have means...” So, what she will do, is to send them to streets to beg for money and food. They will catch a train to town, with the plan to go back home.

The findings on the child trafficking inquiry link well with the literature reports which helped the researcher uncover more hidden critical issues involved including

dangerous cultural practices notably *ukuthwala* which is in isiZulu loosely translated as child-bride Mnisi (2020:6). The author's findings are juxtaposed to the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, 2000, alerting that, "Child marriage is a very specific sub-form of child trafficking and, therefore, the same international legal standards that are applied to child trafficking, which are extensive, should also be applied to child marriage." A critical aspect of this problem that frustrates the author is sexual and labor exploitations involved as "several human rights such as the right to equality, the right to give free and full consent in marriage, the right to education and the right to be free from slavery" are immensely violated (Mnisi 2020:6). Undoubtedly, human trafficking in South Africa has cultural causal factors which regrettably Bello and Olutola (2022:4) do not condemn in the strongest terms as they only explore socioeconomic and political aspects. Yet, Central in Motseki and Mofokeng (2022:7) is a voice of a young girl survivor who escaped human trafficking ordeal:

When I was trafficked, most the victims were girls from rural areas of South Africa and to a smaller number from the urban areas, and also foreign nationals from SADC countries, Thailand and Brazil. The age of victims from South Africa was between age of 12 to 25 years, and all the races were trafficked.

This report is testimony showing that children living on and off the streets are not only exposed to a lack of shelter and other basic needs to get out of their dire conditions, but they are also easily accessible to human trafficking rings.

#### **3.4.2.2 Category 1.2.2: The reality of life on the streets**

The category of the reality of life on the streets is another crucial inquiry raised from the study findings. It is represented through social workers' views on the daily circumstances of children living on and off the streets. The idea of undignified life is used, because living on the streets is associated with a plethora of social risks summarised into four sub-categories, namely: (1) alarming violation of children's rights of children living on the streets, (2) unhealthy lifestyle, (3) citizens of the street, and (4) dangerous behaviours.

##### **Sub-category 1.2.2.1: Alarming violation of children's rights**

One of the characteristics of the life of children who live on and off the streets is a violation of their rights to enjoy quality of life. Interviewed social workers confirmed this inquiry saying the following:

**SAWH:** *Those children are mistreated by almost everyone who sees them on [the] street. It is as if they are not human beings. For example, sometimes you find that a child of 16 years old has her own two babies, staying with them on the street. When you look at those babies, they are hungry, they don't have any food or clothes and their so-called mother looks so miserable. Men take turn on her so that she can feed those little ones. Some men don't pay, while others are very abusive and sometimes those little ones also get raped. Later you find out that even the grandmother of those little ones is staying there with them, which makes it very difficult to place the little ones in a place of safety, as they don't want to be separated...*

**SAWG:** *They [the children] were deprived of their right of going to school and stuff like that. We built relationship of trust through our outreach; that how we get to know real issues faced on daily basis. But also, we try to trace their parents ....*

The rights of all children, including vulnerable children who are potentially exposed to a situation of living on and off the streets are globally promoted under the UN and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in particular goal 16 which advocates for child protection and justice (Harper and Collio 2024:5). Among the researchers who want to see change is Mboza (2023:6) who arguably states that children's rights are enshrined in the article 32 United Nations, "children have the right to be protected from economic exploitation and from work that could be harmful for them" and also mentions quality education as a turning point. Here, the researcher sees that the UN framework is overlapping with section 110 (5) of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 which in her view should serve as guide to enforce the rights of children living on and off streets realigning responses with the following directives:

- Ensure the safety and well-being of the children concerned regardless any circumstances they are facing which may include life threatening situations.
- First-track child protection services for children involving the relevant authorities and key stakeholders including designated child protection organisations.

- Assist children requiring critical services in the areas such as counselling, family mediation, early intervention, family reconstruction and rehabilitation, behavioural change, referrals to qualified individual services providers and organisations (Social Development Department 2023:112-113).

The above priorities and others that are not cited are based on an understanding that, through the storylines gathered from the participants, CYCC social workers are on the frontline with first-hand information about the harsh circumstances children endure living on and off the streets without social support. The researcher supports advocates for these vulnerable children who believe that it does not matter that society perceives them as rebels, dagga smokers, glue sniffers, or other sobriquets; they are still children whose rights are protected and enforceable in the court of law (Makofane 2014:134). In other words, the message conveyed is that all humans are entitled to enjoy quality of life, including vulnerable children living on and off the streets who are members of society as well.

#### ***Sub-category 1.2.2.2: Unhealthy lifestyle***

Social workers have answered a question by painting a picture of the unhealthy lifestyles of children living on and off the streets. This condition was extensively assessed leaning on the following paragraphs:

***SAWH:*** *You find street children, especially in some intersection of streets begging, or on pavements injecting one another [with] drugs... exchanging used syringes... mind you! There on pavements sometimes you find them seated motionless as if they are dead, seated as they are high. In the morning, they are found sleeping on street pavements, in front of shops, in parks... You will also find them at the dustbins scavenging [for] food. Most of them look so old and untidy...*

***SWF:*** *Another thing I can add is that we know most of these children because we work with them for a long time... and we know who stay where and how they sleep and which conditions, especially if you visit areas such as Marabastad...*

For further development and analysis, Tarafdar (2020:25) defines their unhealthy lifestyle as a major consequence of “where” and “how” children are forced to live on



the streets. It is a culmination of unconventional and conventional survival ways like rubbish picking, petty crimes, drug abuse, prostitution, petty theft, working in conditions dangerous to health, starvation, drug trafficking, developing passive and aggressive attitudes, replacing their families with street gangs, and experiencing social, sexual, physical, and emotional abuse, among others. A while ago, Liebenberg (2019: v) commissioned a study that also revealed the same issues, strongly warning that children living on the streets are more vulnerable, as they face social, sexual, alerting “social workers need to be made aware of the misconception that a positive medical report is the most important evidence to prove sexual abuse.”

Taking into consideration all their circumstances revolving around an unhealthy lifestyle, it appears that children living on and off the streets is a broad subject which involves more than one discipline besides social work. Social workers’ findings on children sharing syringes to inject each other with drugs, rape cases, and scavenging food from public refuse bins fall under the medical, psychological, and public health fields.

### ***Sub-category 1.2.2.3: Citizens of the street***

The study participants’ understanding in relation to the status of children living on and off streets is that they have been there for many years. It has emerged that the streets have become like homes for these vulnerable children, because they have lived there for so long. ‘Citizens of the street’ was introduced to describe their circumstances as follows:

***SAWH:*** ...there are children who seem not to see anything wrong with staying on streets. Street is their home and if they sense that you are trying to remove them, they hide themselves or they move to the other city. These ones we journey with them, we allow them to use our offices for anything they need. It is a very difficult process because some of these children are ‘citizens of streets. They were born in streets and are growing on streets and they know no other life but the street.”

***SWA:*** These children will leave streets and go to spend some time in their families. As they have built a solid relationship with their friends living on the streets, they want

*to go back to see them... The result is that they end up getting used to a life on streets...*

In Blerk, Shand and Hunter (2020:331) these children include youth without family and community networking, deprived of “formal citizenship due to their age and exclusion from school or other state apparatus through which cultural/moral values are shared.” Julien (2022:163) describes well this juncture arguing that in fact the longer children living on and off-street style the more they are “distanced from possible rehabilitation resources and thus become absorbed into the street life culture.” Perhaps, it is this distressful situation making Julien (2022:164) drawing a line by stating that, children living on and off streets “form the most vulnerable groups in any society.” Additionally, *streetism* is a term that was coined also to describe patterns involved and Shitindi, Nyello and Mswima (2023:47) implying “the desperate and often harrowing situation” because of “spending most of their lives outside their homes.”

Taking into consideration all facts, the irony of the street citizens is that the recurrence of children living on and off the streets is not a fairytale, but a linguistic expression appealing for a natural environment that helps nurture them become good, responsible citizens and thrive. Thus, working with children living on and off the streets, social workers’ views have a role to play making them (children) realise that there are rights that “they could turn to, to gain support and eventually create a better life” (Friberg & Martinsson 2017:28).

#### ***Sub-category 1.2.2.4: Dangerous behaviours***

One of complications surrounding the recurrence of children living on and off the streets is behavioural change among these vulnerable children. As pointed out in the interviews, spending a long period of time on the streets and a disconnection from parenting and education in general forced children to learn dangerous behaviours to survive on the streets:

***SAWF:*** *When that time comes... they are asking for money. You also must be careful all the time... you don't go to outreach with a phone or money in your pocket because*

*some of them will steal it from you and when you want to get your phone back, they will threaten you with a sharp knife.*

**SWA:** *These places that we normally do outreaches are very hidden and scary to visits. When you talk to them, they are in a group of five to four of them. They are not scared of injecting themselves drugs in your presence. They would get involved in physical fight, and others will tell you that 'We sell our bodies because we want money'..."*

The two storylines should not be read in simple terms, as they go beyond the participants' observations of the movement of children in their places of abode. An important element is their ability and courage to build a relationship while motivating children to share their personal life ("We sell our bodies..." – SWA) without a judgmental attitude or condemnation. The official website for Cumber and Tsoka-Gwegweni (2022:85) narrate implications of dangerous behaviours and violence as the biggest issues among others ranging from physical injuries, violence, communicable diseases including diarrheal diseases, respiratory diseases, mental health issues, substance abuse, reproductive health disorders, mortality, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS. However, a disappointment in this report is that prostitution is not profiled as a dangerous behaviour among children on the streets, which aggrieved the participants in the interviews. Hills, Meyer-Weitz, and Asante (2016:4) became aware of the problem after interviewing a survivor:

There are boys that rape us, who don't see us as sisters, but as girls that are there to get raped. I was raped by a guy... I felt so powerless when I got raped, I did not even try to fight back. I just let him do whatever he was doing, and I just kept on crying...

The researcher comments that a child involved in raping another one, whether on the streets or elsewhere, is a dangerous behaviour to worry all role players. Certainly, vulnerable children growing up disoriented will reach the adulthood stage and undoubtedly become a source of direct danger to society.

### **3.4.3 Sub-theme 1.3: Social workers' experiences in the CYCCs**

It is important to keep in mind that sub-theme 1.2 was about social workers' experiences of children in the environment of the streets. Details on their circumstances are reflected in the storylines from the six interviewed social workers together with the two social auxiliary workers. With the present sub-theme, the participants' views on the experiences of social workers are explored covering the environment of children living on and off the streets who are brought into the CYCCs. The reporting profiles four categories: (1) intake of children, (2) life at the CYCCs, (3) programmes at the CYCCs, and (4) internal and external support to social workers.

#### **3.4.3.1 Category 1.3.1: Intake of children**

The first category about social workers' experiences of children in the CYCCs is about findings on the intake of children who come to CYCCs from their families, the streets, or from other shelters. Social workers and social auxiliary workers have indicated the formal process through which children living on and off the streets are admitted into the CYCCs in the following storylines:

**SAWG:** *...we were informed that we are not allowed to remove children from the street. Only [the Department of] Social Development and police officers have the right to remove those kids from streets. So, us we get children from DSD. The designated social workers are the ones that place children with us.... That doesn't mean that if we see a child on street and we just leave the child there. What we do, we inform either the police officer, or the social development...*

**SWE:** *...some are brought by the police, some we receive calls from neighbours to alert us that maybe there is a child who is being abused, then the social worker will go do a home visit and investigate... Social workers from DSD and social workers who are working for child protection organisations... would go and investigate and if it is true that the child is being abused, they would refer the child to us...*

**SWD:** *So, we are working closely with welfare organisations outside like CMR [Caring, Mentoring and Restoring], SAVF [Suid-Afrikaane Vrouefederasie], RATA. They are part of the Reformed Church... Yeah, they do statutory work, they get to remove the children once it has been reported, when they feel is necessary, they get*

*to remove the children, they go to the Children's Court to apply for an order to place a child...*

As data clearly confirms, admitting children into CYCCs follows the legislative framework and reference is made to the Children's Act 38 of 2005. A directive is that if a child is found in need of care and protection, the Children's Court is involved to decide before his/her placement into a place of safety. The Act also indicates that in case of emergency, designated social workers and the police are allowed to place a child in an alternative place of safety with due consideration. Some examples are a child requiring immediate emergency protection or if there are delays in the court to process the placement order and a child is likely to suffer from harm while waiting (Masson, Dickens, Garside, Bader and Young 2019: xvi).

Admission of children into the CYCCs appears to be going on quite well by adhering to the government's norms and standards, but the researcher raises the importance of social workers getting a mandate as well to fast track the placement of children living on and off the streets.

#### **3.4.3.2 Category 1.3.2: Life at the CYCCs**

The researcher wanted to hear how children behave when they are removed from the street and living in a proper environment where they receive the care and respect that children deserve. The study participants' observations are that from the beginning of their stay they are to ensure that psychosocial therapy and counselling programmes for children are implemented. However, this process is not just automatic; it requires caregivers with qualities and skills such as listening, understanding, patience, and interpersonal skills to handle children under serious distress. Three scenarios have been recorded for further analysis:

**SWA:** *Very much reserved, they don't want to open up. When you speak to them, they hold up... I think they are hurting inside. But they are not yet ready to talk about what they are going through. They just need patience, you just need to journey with them, we don't know for how long... I had a case where one of the girls told me some very painful words... "You don't know what you are doing here"... She came to my*

*office... she took these files, and she threw them down and they were all over... she was very angry... she then took stones and hit the cars... she was very, very, angry...*

**SWF:** *Yeah, this is what I am faced with at [...] <sup>3</sup>, because we have got those children who are always angry. They would tell you that they are not scared of anyone or anything! They would aggressively bang on the doors and everything they come across in the house. They can even physically assault you if you do not really become very careful.*

**SAWG:** *“From ashes to beauty...” That is how we see our work with children on and off streets.*

These social workers and social auxiliary workers are not the only players to be overwhelmed by children’s distress. Ghimire (2014:10) attributes the problem to many issues like substance abuse and gang activities, besides living in an environment without healthcare services, toilets, bath facilities, and adequate shelter. Another factor pointed out is the fact that children do not have parental education and guidance. A persistent disconnectedness exposes them to dramatic events characterised by anti-social behaviours, including theft and child prostitution, as a means to survive, as already mentioned in the previous category. From the heart of the findings, the researcher observes that social workers and social auxiliary workers appeal to the public for the nature of their work and each child’s unique circumstances in a CYCC, with an understanding that places of safety and protection constitute a chance to make an impact in the lives of vulnerable children.

### **3.4.3.3 Category 1.3.3: Programmes at the CYCCs**

An interest in delving into the CYCCs’ programmes was not merely to generate a comprehensive list, but to establish whether there is inconsistency with norms and standards in administration to stop children living on and off the streets. In interacting with social workers and social auxiliary workers, the researcher recorded their views for further reflection:

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<sup>3</sup> This is the name of a CYCC that has been omitted in accordance with the ethical principle of privacy and confidentiality in the study.

**SWF:** *The intake of new children, opening their files, doing IDP [individual development plan] with them. Counselling and therapy, developing and implementing recreational programmes, developing and implementing developmental programmes, and to make sure that educational programme is well implemented.*

**SWE:** *...we make sure that we enrol them in schools, we put them in schools so that they acquire education which will be able to open a brighter future for them. They are provided with accommodation, clothing, they have food, and all their basic needs are met. We also do reintegration services; we trace for the families of the children, we connect them together, because some end up in the street but they still have families, so we look for their families. We try to mend the relationship and make sure that they start afresh, and they build a meaningful relationship...*

**SWD:** *I am responsible for the wellbeing – the emotional wellbeing – of the kids, reconstruction, rebuilding, everything to start over, to push that reset reboot button. We do not have specific programmes that we are running with children, but each child is evaluated when they are admitted to the children's home. We have two educational psychologists who are volunteers helping in the areas of emotional assessment, scholastic assessments to determine which level of academic performance they might be, and other emotional status like poor self-esteem, excellent manipulation skills...*

Daily running of support programmes shows a commitment by CYCCs to address the complex needs of children, including psychosocial therapy and counselling, in a more integrated way. These expectations are part of the legislative framework and key responsibilities (Phaswana & Erlank 2023:44-45):

- Assessing the children concerned to determine a care strategy.
- Drawing up an IDP for each child.
- Ensuring that staff working with children implement the IDPs.
- Ensuring that the therapy children receive aligns with the care plan.
- Ensuring that the case conferences occur with other professionals involved in a child's case.

- Monitoring the development of children and intervening, when necessary.
- Preparing children who are to leave successfully.
- If there are siblings, ensuring they are kept abreast of decisions regarding the child or children concerned.
- Facilitating all visits to children to protect them from possible harm and trauma.

However, the researcher is wondering about the exclusion of the joint parental responsibilities and rights in the bigger plan of tackling pull and push factors (Social Development Department 2023:201). She believes if parents are not engaged, the CYCCs countrywide will be seen as social facilities only meant to address short-term needs and not root causes. Quoting Malatji and Dube (2017:113), working closely with families help “a parent or a caregiver who may be feeling some regret for abandoning or abusing a child may need psychological debriefing and family counselling.” Thus, the rollout of a parental plan (Social Development Department 2023:201) is aligned with the ecosystem for the street children and the pyramid of early prevention through family support contemplated in Chapter One, section 1.2.2. The emphasis is on early interventions, family support centre, formal and informal services, parental education, housing assistance, and community or neighbourhood advocacy (McCoy & Keen 2022:223).

#### **3.4.3.4 Category 1.3.4: Internal and external support to social workers**

Social workers reported to the researcher a lack of support from the CYCCs’ top managers to stop the recurrence of children living on and off the streets. This report was summarised into two sub-categories: (1) internal support and (2) external support.

##### ***Sub-category 1.3.4.1: Internal support***

Looking at how difficult it is to work with vulnerable children to adjust their behaviours, the researcher’s aim was to learn how well CYCCs’ senior managers support social workers to achieve this goal. Interestingly, what she found is that only two social workers received assistance:



**SWB:** *I think we are very lucky here regarding our pay and everything. We get paid well. I don't think that we get paid what we get from DSD. I think the working environment is much better. I mean, I don't need to fight for a call, or things like that...*

**SWC:** *...we try to support each other, because sometimes we deal with difficult staff. So, my colleague will make me a cup of tea and seat next to me and so we can talk about it and lough sometimes...*

**SWD:** *It feels like they don't understand. Especially management. They don't understand exactly what you are doing, what you are dealing with.*

**SWF:** *We lack support in many things including workload, low salaries, lack of debriefing sessions and so on...*

**SWA:** *We don't have pension fund [or] even medical aid and the circumstances we work under are very challenging, and the amount we are getting is very unfair. The job that is being done at the CYCC is way more than of the designated social workers.*

One of the internal support mechanisms for social workers to perform is employment wellness to boost their morale while working with vulnerable children. Low salary is contested in the literature as part of that employment wellness promoting an ideal work environment. Those who are concerned about the future of the social work industry are looking at the problem holistically to include underfunded CYCCs, resulting in social workers facing a culmination of heavy workload, distress, and burnout (Skhosana 2020:115). Yet, the Minister of Social Development herself confirms a critical shortage of social service professionals in the country, but does not investigate causal factors to find a long-lasting solution (The Citizen 2022). Thus, if CYCC social workers feel their counterpart designated social workers' wellness is better than theirs, they are consequently likely to lose passion and focus to keep up with prevention and care support services.

#### **Sub-category 1.3.4.2: External support**

In addressing issues of children living on and off the streets in more decisive and comprehensive ways, the participants pointed out that social workers want to work

with the external agencies to share the responsibilities of addressing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets. However, their experience indicates that the support they get is not good enough, as demonstrated by their complaints:

**SWD:** ...we are speaking of grants; we don't even get full subsidy from DSD...

**SWE:** *Our Council has been challenged so many times... we are paying our membership fees every year, but still, we do not see anything happening! There have been complaints that social workers who work for not-for-profit organisations are not treated fairly, but I have not seen anyone from the council [SACSSP] coming to our centre... I do not even know their mandate...*

**SWA:** *They [designated social workers] for example remove a child and place her under your care; that's it! We raise the child and help them be a better person in future, but I feel that we are not being recognised. You do not see them coming and make a follow up on the child's progress...*

More essentially, the SACSSP's mandate is "to advise the Minister on the amendment or adaptation of this Act, in particular to place greater emphasis on professional practice, democracy, transparency, equity, accessibility and community need and involvement" (Social Development Department 2023:137). Furthermore, the Act requires a Member of the Executive Council for the DSD as a provincial strategy ensuring all CYCCs are properly resourced, coordinated, and managed (Social Development Department 2023:193-197). Key stakeholders are not connected with the situation on the ground to investigate complaints of frustrated social workers who are trying to stop the recurrence of children living on and off the streets. Reading the participants' views, one may further sense that the above-mentioned stakeholders are not interested in whether vulnerable children sleep well, eat well, attend school, have access to entertainment, or receive medical attention, among other activities contributing to their development to thrive. A lack of external support therefore becomes a threat to prevention care services and the integrity of CYCCs to break down the cycle of children living on and off the streets. The researcher believes that although the SACSSP is not directly involved in internal operations, it externally plays a part as higher authority to oversee the implementation

of models of good practices to promote the industry of social services while ensuring that all registered social workers are well supported to discharge their mandate.

### **3.4.4 Sub-theme 1.4: Social workers' experiences of different ways to exit children from the CYCCs**

A last consideration of the sub-themes developing social workers' experiences of children in the identified environments concerns storylines of children exiting from the CYCCs. The sub-theme reflects four categories processed to give more details about (1) children running away from the CYCC, (2) turning 18 years old/adulthood, (3) adoption, and (4) family reunification.

#### **3.4.4.1 Category 1.4.1: Children running away from the CYCC**

Study participants have reported on cases of children who leave the premises without discussing their exit plans with caregivers. The researcher was surprised to learn that social workers involved in outreaches are meeting the absconded children on the streets:

**SWA:** *...we have got rules, at five o' clock you are not supposed to be on the street... That is not what they are used to and most of time the thing they do is to abscond. You think a child is going to the shops and she is gone. Back to the life of street is a reality we experience as social workers.*

**SWE:** *...then we have kids who have been exposed to sexual abuse at an early age. So, they are sexually active they can't stay in one place they always want to abscond so they can meet with their boyfriends outside. These guys do not allow them to come back to the shelter...*

The participants believe children find CYCCs' rules frightening, making them miss the freedom they would have enjoyed whilst on the streets. The mismatch between the stringent residential rules and children's sense of freedom is a concern in the management of CYCCs. Findings also show another concern of perpetrators who target children living in a place of safety. "These guys do not allow them to come back to the shelter..." (SWE). In both events, the law is clear on what drastic measures

should be taken to rescue children and which parties are tasked to lead the process (Social Development Department 2023:174):

- The designated social worker who placed a child in alternative care is responsible to bring that child back into the house.
- When the child fails to return to alternative care after the expiration of leave of absence, the designated social worker should ensure that the child is brought back to the place of safety.
- If the designated social worker or a police official who does the apprehension has reasonable grounds for believing that a child is in or on certain premises, they can enter and search the premises without warrant for the purpose of apprehending the child.
- The police are allowed to use force to overcome any resistance when trying to apprehend the child. The police must first ensure the safety of the child and inform the designated social worker and the DSD.

Further to the above guidelines, the law is also clear about calling on perpetrators to account for their ill behaviours. However, according to Gupta-Kagan (2022:258) child protection system is not working as it fails to achieve its core goals which among others includes creating a safer environment for children to develop and fully realise their potential. The issue of children who live on and off the streets absconding from CYCCs is a setback deterring social workers in their efforts to support vulnerable children in their healing process. In support of these efforts, the law requires everyone from society to be aware of the nature of the work performed within the CYCCs and support it. If a safe environment cannot be promoted with community buy-in, social workers will then find themselves failing their mandate and responsibilities to contribute toward the prevention of children returning to the streets.

#### **3.4.4.2 Category 1.4.2: Turning 18 years old/ adulthood**

Children move out of CYCCs in compliance with the policy that does not allow them to stay in the house after reaching 18 years of age. The researcher's enquiry aimed to record social workers and social auxiliary workers' views on children's safe exit and independent living to prevent a recurrence on the streets. The following information caught the attention of the researcher:

**SAWH:** ...and then they reach 18 and the government tells you no, she is now adult she must go. Where are you taking the child to? Back again to the street?

**SWA:** You work with a child and when she is 18, now what am I going to do? Then you will push the child to the first option she presents to you. For example, if she tells you that she found a friend, will you allow her to go because you don't have an option? Yes, and of which is wrong. Because it might come back to you as a social worker.

The perceptions of social workers are echoed in the previous research works covering the uncertainty of youth transitioning from CYCCs. Once they have been allowed to leave unprepared, their struggles are “compounded by widespread poverty, crime violence and the high number of youths who are not in education, employment, or training” (Bond 2018:76-77). “The same risk factors that contribute to children getting into care contribute to challenges in youth transitioning out of care and into communities” (Moodley, Raniga & Sewpaul 2018:7).

Typically, the heart of social workers and social auxiliary workers' disappointment is to see children who were under their care go back to the streets in the absence of an independent living plan and sustainable intervention to prevent it. Lack of considerations in processing the exit of children from CYCCs is therefore recorded among other factors hampering social workers and social auxiliary workers with a passion to render professional prevention care services.

#### **3.4.4.3 Category 1.4.3: Adoption**

Adoption is another channel ranked high when processing findings to study the circumstances of children exiting from CYCCs. Concerning this inquiry, the participants were aware of the adoption cases taking place without assessing the situation of children and families to determine their readiness. This personal judgment is from one participant's comments:

**SAWG:** ...but the lady said, 'no I am fine; I will stay with the child'. But then she brought back the child after three months and said 'no I cannot deal with this'. And then we took back the child. We gave her some assignment to say go and think about

*it, maybe you are still going to come back and take her. Then she went, after a while she came back and said 'now I am ready I want to take her back... I feel it is this and that...*

Fighting for a child's best interests in the adoption process is of paramount importance (Social Development Department 2023:244). Its purpose is comprehensively characterised to protect and nurture children by providing a safe, healthy environment with positive support, and to promote the goals of permanency planning by connecting children to safe and nurturing family relationships (Somi 2023:38). With all these elements, the main intent is ultimately a safe home where, in general, a child can develop familial relationships that last a lifetime (Rolock et al 2023:1).

Integrating these reports with the findings, the researcher's view is that the adoption system within CYCCs is inherently weak and cannot therefore enhance social workers' efforts while applying their knowledge to stop the recurrence of children living on and off the streets.

#### **3.4.4.4 Category 1.4.4: Family reunification**

Family reunification is also another point that attracted the researcher's attention in exploring social workers and social auxiliary workers' views on possible ways children exit from CYCCs. The participants expressed their dissatisfaction regarding the ways family reunification is handled to ensure that children do not come back to residential care. These stories were recorded to uncover further details and more issues involved:

**SAWG:** *...the child was raped in the community where she is coming from. And then the next thing we heard was that her designated social worker was just placing the child back to her family members. And then we asked ourselves, is the perpetrator still there or what happened to him? Is the child ready to go back? Is the child prepared to go? They just went to the court and did the paperwork there and then they came back saying everything was fine there at home whereas they didn't involve us in the whole process, including the child herself...*

*SWF: The child gets surprised, 'I am going back to my family...', then they take the child back. To show that the child was not ready and was not prepared, she came back. In this case what do you do? ...you just accept and continue to do your work knowing something is wrong...*

The category of reunification can be further developed including all services from the CYCCs with the expectation that once the exit process starts, a primary focus will be reunifying children with their families (Farmer 2018:11). This process is spearheaded by designated social workers whose responsibilities are prescribed by law (Social Development Department 2023:110):

- Investigate what caused the child to leave the family home;
- address those causes and take precautionary action to prevent a recurrence; and
- provide counselling to both the child and the family before and after reunification.

After deliberation, the participants' views show signs of uncoordinated activities within the CYCCs' day-to-day running. It also appears that social workers and their DSD counterparts are not working together with children and parents to model best practices for an ideal family reunification. If services like parenting skills and general life skills to assist biological parents to their full capacity (De Villiers 2008:167) are regarded as secondary, CYCCs will underachieve in leading the fight against the recurrence of children living on and off the streets.

### **3.5 THEME 2: SOCIAL WORKERS' CHALLENGES RELATED TO PREVENTION SERVICE DELIVERY TO CHILDREN LIVING ON AND OFF THE STREETS**

So far, the researcher has reported on social workers' experiences of children living on and off the streets, which is crucial for the development of the study topic. Theme 2, as introduced here, is undertaken to report on another crucial element of the study topic, namely social workers' challenges arising from the delivery of prevention services to children living on and off the streets. The reporting is structured looking at four sub-themes: (1) challenges in the family environment, (2) challenges in the

street environment, (3) challenges in CYCCs, and (4) challenges related to children exiting from CYCCs.

### **3.5.1 Sub-theme 2.1: Social workers' challenges in the family environment**

The issue of social workers' challenges in delivering prevention services to children living on and off the streets in a family environment allowed the researcher to get a sense of push and pull factors set out in two categories dealing with (1) lack of joint parenthood and (2) tracing the parental homes of children.

#### **3.5.1.1 Category 2.1.1: Lack of joint parenthood**

Findings have revealed that social workers visiting children in families are becoming overwhelmed. They are finding the parents' situations dire, especially because of poor living conditions aggravated by poverty and lack of the income a household needs to survive. The respondents complained that when conducting family assessments, they are obliged to shift their focus from the vulnerable children to the entire households' social conditions. It was important to establish three sub-categories to further develop the key issues involved: (1) the DSD, (2) parental negligence, and (3) unrealistic expectations.

##### ***Sub-category 2.1.1.1: Department of Social Development***

Social workers claimed that the DSD social workers in charge of statutory work are not fast tracking the removal of children despite regular reports. The feeling is that dragging out the process is from a lack of constant communication with the social workers on the ground, which frustrates their efforts to apply their knowledge to scale up effective services for children who require emergency protection. Participants were recorded saying the following:

**SWB:** ...sometimes the parents move, and then the DSD social worker shifts their file as well. But they don't communicate with us. Then they close the file and say 'no, the father or mother moved to that area so, I am no longer the designated social worker'. Which doesn't work that way. But yeah! And then sometimes the parents move again and then there is no social worker. So, there's nobody taking responsibility for the statutory placement of the child.



**SWF:** *Yes, we end up doing home visits on their behalf, because they are the ones who should be communicating with families. We focus on the child; they focus on the family and the child. So, you find that we end up liaising between the family and child, because they are unavailable when you need them.*

Pondering SWF's perception alone, there appears to be inconsistency in the application of section 147 of Children's Act 38 of 2005 (Social Development Department 2023:146) where the supervisory duties of the DSD are elucidated: (a) outreach services; (b) education, information, and promotion; (c) therapeutic programmes; (d) family preservation; (e) skills development programmes; (f) diversion programmes; (g) temporary safe care; and (h) assessment of programmes...

Parents do not always have the resources to invest in their children and may not be in a position to make the appropriate sacrifices for their children's wellbeing. The DSD's intervention is to honour the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child that guarantees children's total wellbeing (Funaro 2015:1). Consequently, social workers are set to fail without the full support to journey with children whose parents are absent from homes, i.e. either they are orphans or parents are in prison or are chronically ill, among other social and economic factors requiring the government's intervention to stabilise the household.

### ***Sub-category 2.1.1.2: Parental negligence***

The participants reported on cases where the parents or guardians do not care that their children are living on and off the streets. This response has compromised the quality of family assessment during their home visitation, since they cannot bring together parents and children for a conversation. The participants' concerns are directly addressed in these paragraphs:

**SAWG:** *We have children whose parents are not able to take their parental responsibilities and their extended families don't want to get involved because they do not have financial means. There is a case of two children's parents living with mental illnesses and [the parents] cannot do anything to help children. We also have parents and relatives who don't want anything to do with their children...*

**SWF:** *Like I said, for some parents it was not even abuse of alcohol. It was just pure neglect. You find a parent doing absolutely nothing or make [no] effort to find whereabouts of a child. You ask them like ‘don’t you worry about your child?’. They are like ‘yeah, I do worry, but I don’t know where to start looking for him’.*

All these reports cannot be taken lightly, especially in the social work profession geared up for child protection. Vulnerable households predisposed to substance abuse lose a sense of parental obligation, which exposes children to an unsafe and unhealthy environment (Đurišić & Bunijevac 2017:140). In the absence of parental love, praise, hugs, and appreciation of who they are, neglected children resort to a dangerous lifestyle of living on and off the streets, hoping that one day life would eventually be better (Ncube 2015:33). Already, complaints start rising that overloaded social workers in CYCCs are offering services that do not fall within the ambit of their role and responsibilities, as they found themselves doing the duties of placement social workers (Dimba-Ndalení, Motlounge & Kasiram 2022:65). In the context of this study, the challenge is for social workers involved in family visits without maximum support and cooperation to deal with complex cases of parental irresponsibility, alcohol abuse, mental illness, and child neglect identified from the findings.

### ***Sub-category 2.1.1.3: Unrealistic expectations***

In a normal workplace environment, CYCC social workers render professional services in respect of their job descriptions. However, according to the findings, parents and the public in general tend to have unrealistic expectations when it comes to working with parents and their children who live on and off the streets to achieve reunification. Unrealistic expectations were assessed from multiple factors:

**SWD:** *...parents or family members give up on all their responsibilities toward the child and expect me to replace them in their parenting role! The child becomes my burden, and I am not sure what to do... and a child knows that she has a mother, father, and a home... in absence of a social worker supervisor, you find yourself taking up duties you have not been trained to perform.*

**SWF:** *I am not sure with a child who has turned 18 years old. I have been working with the parents, but they say she should continue to stay in the shelter, there is no space for her at home... even DSD tells me at 18 years old, a child is an adult, she must leave the CYCC, take care of herself, or go back home.*

The microsystem environment connecting children who live on and off the streets with all social structures, including homes, schools, and people with emergency contacts, defines the challenge of unrealistic expectations (Martinello (2020:327). It was applied by a group of social workers in Durban where CYCC social workers were found to be subjected to unrealistic expectations. It was also found that they perform responsibilities falling outside of the area of social work expertise (Dimba-Ndalen et al 2022:65):

What is lacking is that it works better if there is a full-time therapist. Someone who is there to provide therapy for the children. Not to be everywhere. If there is a problem, they call you. So now you are counselling, then you are disciplining – it is not right. You are guiding the mom. Then you are everywhere.

Using the researcher's personal experience as an example, it is unrealistic for the DSD to expect a social worker to manage the successful family reunification of a child whose parents require support following alcohol abuse and poverty. Social workers may be well committed to their duties, but do not possess all the expertise to provide more integrated and holistic prevention care services in unstable homes. A major challenge is a lack of time to optimally focus on core responsibilities aligned to acquired knowledge and professional experience to connect the CYCCs with vulnerable families in the fight against the scourge of children living on and off the streets.

### **3.5.1.2 Category 2.1.2: Tracing the parental homes of children**

Children living on and off the streets in CYCCs are brought in via different agencies, notably the DSD, police, and other licensed organisations. For social workers to start doing family visits in an effort to develop a relationship between the parents and their children they need to first locate the children's parental homes, which is not always a successful process. This is explained by the following participants:

**SWD:** *Some children have been living together with their parents on streets under trees or building pavements and always keep on moving. A child will take you to [the] place where she left her mother, but when you get to that spot the mother is not there and you cannot trace her whereabouts.*

**SWF:** *...it does not end here when children are dropped at the shelter. We start the process of family connection and reconciliation. A big challenge is that sometimes you find out that the addresses that were given when children [were] brought into the house do not exist. You also try to phone the numbers that were given, and you cannot find any family relatives.*

**SAWG:** *If shacks burned down and parents move, it won't be easy to find them. Remember some of them do not have phones, so you cannot contact them. Others have been removed from illegally occupied lands by the government. A challenge is you cannot locate their new place.*

The process of tracing parental homes is challenging. It involves searching for a child's legal or primary caregivers and other family members with the aim of finding a long-term solution that is in the child's best interests (which usually means reuniting the child with their parents or other close relatives) (Prasad 2021:2119). The process also refers to taking a child back to where they came from to speak to their relatives and local community members to find out more about how and why the child came to be on the streets (Schrader-McMillan and Herrera 2016:229). This second perspective reflects a two-faced coin in that, besides the struggle to locate a child's home, there is also a need to evaluate parental circumstances to get into the real causes of children living on and off the streets. At this stage, CYCC social workers will eventually perform poorly without support from designated social workers and the DSD to play the supervisory role.

### **3.5.2 Sub-theme 2.2: Challenges in the street environment**

The second sub-theme generated from the findings under the social workers' challenges related to delivering prevention services to prevent the recurrence of children living on and off the streets focuses on the environment of the streets where

they spend most of their time. The sub-theme is unpacked under two categories: (1) undocumented children and (2) dealing with unsupervised children.

### **3.5.2.1 Category 2.2.1: Undocumented children**

The findings have revealed that children living on and off the streets do not have legal documents. The status of undocumented children was noted to reflect on the challenges social workers face to assist these children:

***SWB:** Children on streets, whether they are local or foreign nationals, you find most of them do not have legal papers. We talk to them and those that are not from here we engage their embassies.*

***SWF:** We work hard to compile important information we submit to DSD with other reports... it seems the reports are not taken to the Home Affairs to apply for the papers of children. We promise to help the children, but they get disappointed...*

The issue of undocumented children has been investigated by Setrana (2018:17) and defined in terms of “a person who is not recognised as a national by any State under the operation of its law”. A concern is that “our laws related to citizenship and their application by Home Affairs are draconian, resulting in large numbers of children, both South Africans and foreigners, falling into the category of undocumented children” (Oosthuizen-Erasmus, and Adlem 2022:311).

Social workers are not alone in exposing the DSD’s lack of support towards these children. In fact, Liebenberg (2019:9) point out that designated social workers hold statutory powers that should be used to promote the fundamental rights of streets children. It is from this angle the researcher believes that the DSD is not doing enough to prioritise Home Affairs papers for children living on and off the streets.

### **3.5.2.2 Category 2.2.2: Dealing with unsupervised children**

Findings confirmed that children living on and off the streets make choices about what kind of life they want to live without parental guidance and supervision to inspire them. From this understanding, unsupervised children on the streets are a challenge for social workers committed to prevention care services to break down the cycle of

children living on and off the street. Three sub-categories describe the participants' views: (1) a cycle of on and off the streets, (2) dealing with the behaviours of children, and (3) children living on and off the streets have become the source of family income.

***Sub-category 2.2.2.1: A cycle of on and off the streets***

Children living on and off the streets is a pattern viewed as children moving from one abode to another in a cycle and no one controls their movements. They move from home to the streets, from the streets to places of safety, and from places of safety back to the streets, restarting the cycle and resulting in instability. Social workers face unparalleled challenges in light of these dynamics:

***SAWH:*** *Children attempt to leave street life, but shortly after getting into the shelter, they start missing the streets; they actually fight to go back. They do not want to be subjected to the shelter rules or only one to control them. They then find a house as a small, closed space to stay in as they are used to stay in the open on streets with all their freedom. Their past experiences of mistrust and a feeling of betrayal discourage them from staying with other people, but only with those they are connected to on streets.*

***SWF:*** *Our street outreach workers meet with kids who lived in many shelters. Some kids are being forcefully removed from the streets by the police without their consents, and in that case you see them back to streets with their friends, which is a problem to us when talking to them.*

Due to limited sources dealing with the nomadic movement of children living on and off the streets, it is difficult to define how exactly this cycle unfolds for further analysis. At this stage, what is revealed is that children do not often want to be reunited with their families or be moved to shelters, as already a sense of independence and street lifestyle have been engraved (Sivuyile et al 2014:5). Furthermore, the instability of life results in a child's lack of trust and lack of a healthy sense of identity, as well as lack of overall personal trustworthiness (Myburgh et al 2015:5).

Amid complex circumstances faced on the streets, social workers underachieve when they really want to render prevention services without sufficiently trained outreach workers and joint support from the community, non-profit organisations (NPOs), and different government spheres and this will not guarantee a positive yield (Prasad 2021:2117).

That observation echoes the participants' views hinting that, in fact, whenever the police embark on the forceful removal of children from the streets, they are not helping to break down the cycle of children living on and off the streets. Instead, they are building a relationship of mistrust and a feeling of betrayal between stakeholders and the children themselves.

#### ***Sub-category 2.2.2.2: Dealing with the behaviours of children***

Behavioural problems in children develop in the absence of supervision and social support services on the streets. Easy access to drugs and other street attractions aimed to destroy them psychologically become a challenge for social workers engaging with them on the streets regularly. The reality is that:

***SAWG:*** *Some of them are abusing substances, others are in prostitution, and they do fight among themselves... another challenge with those children that are on streets, they learn the survival means like stealing or selling stolen items.*

***SAWH:*** *I remember the other time we sent her to the government rehabilitation [centre] and she stayed there for three months, but when she came back, she started using drugs again. Then we found a private rehabilitation [centre] that was so expensive. We paid it and sent her there. It was worse there, because she had access on drugs inside the rehabilitation centre. They dismissed her after four months, and she is now back to the streets.*

Looking at the holistic picture of circumstances on the streets, it is no surprise that participants mentioned the behavioural problems of children living on and off the streets. Some of these behaviours have a long-lasting impact, such as inappropriate sexual behaviours, drug abuse and addiction, rape, alcoholism, fighting, criminality, violence, anger, stealing, and lack of respect (Ncube 2015:83).

Considering push factors, some of these children have left their homes because of ill behaviours and mistreatment from their parents. Some fathers leave their children with their mothers and instead of loving and caring for their children they become a threat due to their drinking habits problems, so they tend to be violent when they are drunk (Wolf and Freisthler 2016:540). Little do they know that as violence and the abuse of alcohol entrench in family affairs, children who are watching are set to learn bad behaviours.

It is that alienating family environment that sponsors children's bad behaviours on the streets. It is therefore because of all these behavioural issues that social workers face challenges while engaging with children involved in substance abuse and violent behaviours on the streets.

***Sub-category 2.2.2.3: Children living on and off the streets have become the source of family income***

Social workers reported that among vulnerable children living on and off the streets, some have been sent by their destitute parents who expect them to earn money for their family needs. The participants find this practice as a big challenge they face in their work:

***SAWH:*** *Some children live on and off street as their lifestyle. They come to work on streets and go back home on weekends with money. Then they will come back again to streets to work for money which helps their parents to buy food.*

***SAWG:*** *...a refugee family from DR Congo was living on the streets with three children. We approached the family because we thought the children were not safe and their rights were being violated. But the mother refused the offer for these children to be placed because she was using them to beg money...*

***SAWH:*** *You will always see street children with adults pretending to be blind although some of them are blind. They are using small children to beg money as they believe the public will feel pity for street children. We know these people are not blind because some are getting services from our drop-in centre. We are also aware of the*



*new trend of adults hiring small children to beg on streets. If you have children to hire, they will pay you R50 per day...*

**SWA:** *I am as well involved in Marabastad outreaches. I visited a family living in a very tiny, rented place with children. Parents pay rent, which is difficult for them without income, they are obliged to send kids to streets to beg money and that how bad the situation has become...*

“New situations are bringing children to the streets... a third of children between 5 and 17 years of age are engaged in child labor” (Aptekar and Stoecklin 2014:10). This report indirectly supports the participants’ view on renting children and hiring of vulnerable babies to generate family income. Reporting to the matter to *The Citizen* (online) Makea (2021) was quoted as saying that, “you can rent a child to sit with you and look forlorn for just R100 a day” and “at least two in every 10 women begging on the street with a child is using a rent a kid.” Reverting to the issue of using children as family means to generate income, the challenge is bigger than social workers and social auxiliary workers thought. It appears the issue of children living on and off the streets is taking a serious turn in becoming a lucrative business which cannot then be left to social workers alone to stop.

### **3.5.3 Sub-theme 2.3: Social workers’ challenges in the CYCC environment**

Social workers’ challenges arising from delivering prevention services to children living on and off the streets in the CYCC environment reflects two categories: (1) children’s intake, and (2) lack of internal management support to social workers.

#### **3.5.3.1 Category 2.3.1: Children’s intake**

Generally working with the government, CYCCs are mostly NGOs with a vision to prevent vulnerable children and youth from sleeping on the streets where their rights are violated. These facilities are literally places of transition aimed at putting all children who pass through their doors on the path to rebuilding their future. Children’s intake is introduced here to underpin social workers’ challenges faced during the children’s intake that is part of their core responsibilities. The researcher has divided the category into five sub-categories: (1) screening process and allocation, (2)

opening files for children living on and off the streets, (3) creating an enabling environment for healing, (4) COVID-19 and lockdown, and (5) heavy workload.

### ***Sub-category 2.3.1.1: Screening process and allocations***

Before children can be offered accommodation, each one of them must go through the screening process involving a CYCC social worker responsible for opening the files. All records related to the background of a child are to be documented and kept safely with all confidentiality for Children's Court procedural purposes (Social Development Department 2023:201). To get a good understanding of the challenges CYCC social workers face, the participants presented their views.

***SWB:*** *Sometimes a child is brought to us on Friday late. A designated social worker who brings the child tells you that she is in a hurry and that she will send the details about the child late via the email. You make a follow-up to get the child's information, but you do not get anything from it.*

***SWA:*** *I tried to persuade the social worker who brought a child here to sit with me and the child, but she apologised that she did not have time saying she was going to attend another meeting. She promised to come back, but never came back. I only heard from her when she called me that I should urgently help compile a child's report for the court.*

Neither the Children's Amendment Act 41 of 2007, nor the Social Services Professions Act 110 of 1978 defines the CYCCs' intake with special reference to children living on and off the streets. However, the Children's Act 38 of 2005 (Social Development Department 2023:155) defines the mandate of designated social workers in general:

- A designated social worker must investigate children's circumstances and compile a report on whether the child is in need of care and protection;
- the designated social worker must report the matter to the DSD; and
- the designated social worker must indicate in the report the measures taken to assist the family, i.e. counselling, mediation, prevention and early intervention services, family reconstruction and rehabilitation, behaviour modification,

problem solving, and referral to another suitable qualified person or organisation.

An integration of all the above responsibilities is key in CYCCs' services for children affected by living on and off the streets. The purpose of screening is beyond accommodation. It means to journey with children towards family reunification and community integration, which cannot be left to CYCC social workers alone to handle.

### **Sub-category 2.3.1.2: Opening files for children living on and off the streets**

Social workers were found to be facing serious challenges when opening new files for children. The gap comes from the fact that they do not get the children's full history to familiarise themselves with the circumstances of their life on the streets and there is no proper written report on background, e.g. schools, health, and legal documents. They only rely on the child's information that is also full of discrepancies given the mere fact that not all children living on and off the streets like telling the truth about their situations, while some of them do not know much about their own situations. All these challenges were recorded along with other pertinent hiccups arising from statutory work:

**SWB:** *You cannot force a child to give you information [that was] supposed to have been given in the time of screening. Working with children from on and off the streets is not an ordinary service. Some of them do not want to give you full story; they only want to open to the designated social worker who brought them into the house.*

**SWF:** *It is not just about giving a child a place to sleep. You need to know well the child and you need to record everything about the child from day one coming to CYCC. But I do not get that support. The fact that sometimes there is an immediate placement of the child in our CYCC, that should not prevent the designated social worker to follow up with the family to get more needed information.*

As mentioned by the above participant concerning immediate placements, in the following circumstances the intake protocol can be bypassed (SACSSP 2020:8):

- Child in immediate danger or currently being harmed. Response required within 24 hours.
- Any sexual violence that occurred within the last 3 days, including rape and gender-based violence.
- Any continuing abuse or exploitation where the person still has access to the child.
- Death threats or threats to seriously injure or sexually abuse a child.
- Pattern of serious injury from violence by family member or other person with access to the victim/survivor.
- Suicide attempts or plans to commit suicide, on-going self-harm.
- Abduction or kidnapping or threat of abduction or kidnapping.
- Exposure to natural disaster resulting in immediate health or protection risks.
- Children without care or in care arrangements where they are in immediate danger.
- Children in conflict with the law (within 48 hours).
- Paupers' burial.
- Confinement or forced isolation (e.g. of child with disability)
- Emergency health issues including resulting from neglect, malnutrition, substance abuse and other illnesses.

Considering social work service supervision and support, designated social workers are not giving guidance as they should to enable quality work to be produced. Nowhere is there a record of giving instructions or guidance (Hope & Van Wyk 2018:421). The SASCCP is not doing much to enforce guidelines to supervise social services for the most vulnerable children. A mandate to coordinate the activities of the professional boards and to act as an advisory and communicatory body is not honoured to support CYCCs (Social Development Department 2023:201). And so, overburdened social workers of CYCCs committed to the plight of children living on and off the streets face more challenges without direct intervention from the highest office regulating the profession.

### ***Sub-category 2.3.1.3: Creating an enabling environment for healing***

Children's intake is expected to take place in a more caring and welcoming environment to make children feel love and protection in the house. Since their responsibilities go deeper than handling the allocation of paperwork, challenges to perform this task well have been recorded to learn more about what can be changed to improve the situation.

**SWA:** ...once they are on street, they do whatever they want whenever they want... It is sad and scary to see a child cutting herself in front of you, or a child to be angry at you sometimes they break things in the house.

**SWA:** I feel that I am overwhelmed of all this... That is why I am saying that social work is draining... Very draining.

**SWE:** It's very difficult because sometimes even you yourself you have your own challenges and sometimes maybe you have been through the same challenges that the kids are experiencing...

**SAWG:** ...what tears my heart, is the issues of rape...

Social workers who work with children living on and off the streets in CYCCs face a lot of challenges and they deal with lots of difficulties related to children's behavioural problems (Phaswana & Erlank 2023:52), as well as the fact that it takes time to carefully follow the process of changing. For example, in the case of a child who is addicted to a substance, it takes a lot of time and energy from both the child and the social worker to change that behaviour. Other behaviours that children living on and off the streets bring into CYCCs, as mentioned by Thesen (2014:32), are truancy, stealing, running away, aggression, substance abuse, inappropriate sexual behaviour, and developmental problems. Consequently, discouraged social workers become frustrated and dissatisfied following poor support to excel in their profession (Thesen 2014:72).

#### **Sub-category 2.3.1.4: COVID-19 and lockdown**

Interviews were done in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, which made the researcher raise the question of how social workers coped during the peak of the pandemic and hard lockdown. The participants' view was that CYCC social workers were thrown into the deep end, as it was difficult to take care of children without the day-to-day running of key programmes associated with schoolwork and therapeutic activities.

**SWA:** *I had to remain inside the house with children for about three months. That was a prison and imagine staying with many teenagers and you do not have activities to keep them busy.*

**SWD:** *All programmes for the children stopped and we could not afford to buy smartphones and data for them to study online. Some of them were fighting to go out to see their friends and our biggest challenge was to stop them from running away.*

Execution of the COVID-19 regulations in CYCCs was to safeguard the health of children and their caregivers as much as possible, which was very positive. Little did the government know the suspension of the day-to-day running of anchor programmes would be a challenge to social workers who stayed with them. The researcher found out that in some places children were raising valid concerns: “*How am I going to finish my grade?*”; “*I can no longer go to school when I’m so close to finishing*”; and “*I may never get a chance to finish my education*” (Haffejee & Levine 2020:8). General speaking, one can say that following the COVID-19 outbreak and lockdown, rich families with facilities such TV and internet connections to access online classes and educational resources continued to help their children to learn without interruptions. This response attests to the participants’ concerns and the researcher’s feeling is that the government overlooked vulnerable children living in CYCCs in Pretoria by not assisting them, while those in wealthy families were studying via various educational platforms.

#### ***Sub-category 2.3.1.5: Heavy workload***

Social workers were concerned about dealing with heavy workloads limiting them from having enough time to build relationships with parents and children to make family reunification possible. The participants confirmed this issue in the following paragraphs:

**SWD:** *I am the only social worker here. We are registered for 63 children, and we are currently 57... I will say the paperwork is the biggest challenge, because it takes me so much time. And then you don’t have enough time that you wanted to spend with a child...*

**SWC:** *You know... you need to be able to do everything, and I don't think we are all equipped enough in our studies to do that...*

**SWE:** *The job that is being done at the CYCCs is way more than that of the designate social workers, because we are on ground.*

Implications of the heavy workload are also underpinned in the literature dealing with the shortage of social workers in South Africa in general. Similar trends show their inability to cope with high work demand while assuming multiple responsibilities that block the implementation of family preservation (Nhedz & Makofane 2015:369).

Social workers are subjected to heavy workloads due to the fact that CYCCs are community projects among many other NGOs operating with insufficient government funding. Frustrated social workers warn that unless welfare organisations receive sufficient funds from the DSD, the requirements of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 to provide family preservation services will not be met (Nhedz & Makofane 2015:369). This recommendation is among many more others alerting that in reality "CYCC social worker roles are strained by having to perform non-related duties apart from those that compromise the core role of social workers in a CYCC (Dimba-Ndalen et al. 2022:68).

Whereas the above trends show that handling a high volume of children may cause frustrations, it may also trigger tensions between CYCC social workers and designated social workers believed to be better paid than their counterparts (Nhedz & Makofane 2015:369).

The implications for this study are that the special social establishments like the CYCCs undertaking to deal with society's failure to preserve families will dismally fail in delivering prevention care programmes without sufficient funding. The end results are that professions like social work will look less attractive, while highly skilled and talented social workers doubt joining the CYCCs to contribute to the delivery of prevention services to combat the issue of children living on and off the streets.

### **3.5.3.2 Category 2.3.2: Internal management support to social workers**

The study has tested the assumption that prevention services to children living on and off the streets cannot move at a smooth and fast pace without full internal management support to social workers. The researcher does not however mean that other caregivers within CYCCs do not require support. Introducing the notion of internal support is to acknowledge that in any normal workplace environment employees need to be motivated, which increases their confidence and production. The participants' responses are divided into two sub-categories: (1) safety concerns of social workers and (2) debriefing space for social workers.

#### ***Sub-category 2.3.2.1: Safety concerns of social workers***

An exploration of safety issues for caregivers, including social workers, was conducted. The motivation was that prevention care services to children living on and off the streets will hardly go smoothly in an awkward environment or one without maximum safety measures to reassure personnel and children. Again, the inquiry was made after learning about the trends of children's unruly behaviours and the inability of caregivers to cope all the way.

**SWB:** *We do not have 24/7 security service; criminals can hurt us at any time. Both the management and DSD are aware of the problem as we always report the incident of house break-in and children absconding from the house... children threaten us with knives...*

**SWD:** *We are afraid to discipline children with violent behaviours. A child will attack you, but you cannot fight back or chase away a child as we are not allowed... When you call the police, they do not respond on time...*

**SWA:** *You just must leave them to do what they want, otherwise they become angry with you. Yeah! this is what I am faced with at this CYCC. Because we have got those who are angry and bang the doors and everything. They can even beat you if not very careful!*

The perception is that all these problems and others not mentioned by the participants are not isolated or unprecedented events. To gain more insights on this



sub-category previous research was consulted, which linked complex behaviours with substance abuse, vandalism, and aggression (Phaswana & Erlank 2023:53): “my car has been thrown with stones by the children, so their acting behaviours sometimes affect you”. Aggressive behaviours range from physical and verbal abuse, involving cursing and threats, to auto-mutilation, arson (including smoking in rooms), using contraband substances, suicide attempts, violation of rules, and refusing instructions (Van den Tillaart, Eltink, Stams, Van der Helm & Wissink 2018:3997).

A possible explanation given for the nature of the problem is that CYCCs’ are lacking multidisciplinary teams to run integrated, holistic care programmes. As a result, CYCCs are failing to provide social and psychological services mainly because of a shortage of enough professionals with a range expertise, including counselling psychologists and nurses (Phaswana & Erlank 2023:58).). Another explanation is also that perhaps not enough attention is being paid to equipping caregivers with the relevant skills for them to develop and maintain positive relationships with children (Van den Tillaart et al., 2018:3993).

In the end, a reluctance to prioritise safety measures within the CYCC operations is a big impediment in these establishments, especially since social workers’ efforts are not supplemented to prevent children from running to the streets.

### ***Sub-category 2.3.2.2: Debriefing space for social workers***

This sub-category provides the responses of social workers revealing how they are not afforded an important space for debriefing, which becomes a stumbling block to rendering prevention services to children who live on and off the streets. On that basis, areas of greater concern have been investigated and recorded to establish trends and further analysis.

**SWA:** *I have been speaking to my director all the time to organise debriefing sessions for us, but she does not really pay attention about that.*

**SWD:** *So that is... and being here, sometimes it feels that even the department are forgetting about me. Yeah, it seems like they are taking a decision. They are seating*

*in their offices, taking decisions, and they don't know what is going on, on the ground level.*

**SWB:** *And they don't understand the stress... until it is taking from you. They don't understand that emotional tiredness is different from being physically tired. They don't understand you. You just need to perform, perform, perform. Do this, do that and that. Sometimes they give you all that you know it can't work because that is not how it works...*

From the above storylines, participants are not only complaining about the lower salaries that they receive from their managers, as recorded earlier, but they are also concerned with the fact that their managers and supervisors do not give them a space to debrief. This process has been recently defined in terms of reflective debriefing as “a social worker-led strategy combining group reflection, debriefing, and education with an aim to alleviate moral distress” (Browning & Cruz 2018:45). The authors emphasise “importance of interprofessional collaboration to successfully combat moral distress among health-care workers” which in their view “may protect them from burnout, detachment, and even quitting their profession...” (Browning & Cruz 2018:46).

With the above practical definition, a compelling reason that the importance of debriefing sessions cannot be stressed enough is they are designed to work with groups of people to process a critical event and the resultant stress, and to collectively provide remedial strategies and move on to the next steps. Implementation of this vision is a common practice in job market in particular community and health care industry where Krywucky (2023:53) introduces personal reflective debriefing model in an understanding that at the workplace, employers will always prioritise the emotional wellbeing. Noting, “in the absence of high-quality, organization-led debriefing practices, workers in community and social service settings are instead practicing unstructured peer-led debriefs that include their lived experiences, feelings, traumas, and triggers” Krywucky (2023:54).

Although debriefing is more regarded as a platform to advance staff wellness, it should be seen an ideal space for both CYCC managers and the DSD to get feedback

on how to improve the available services to easily stop the recurrence of children living on and off the streets. Creating that space is a positive response to help boost all caregivers' efforts to remain resilient to deal with challenges standing in their way while engaging with children who live on and off the streets and succeed.

#### **3.5.4 Sub-theme 2.4: Social workers' challenges related to children exiting from CYCCs**

Challenges social workers face when children are due to exit from the CYCCs which gave them temporary accommodation have been reported. This is the time for children who have been under temporary care services to move out to start a new chapter in their lives, which is a big challenge to social workers in practice. Under this sub-theme, one category has been identified to explain how CYCCs are currently under-resourced.

##### **3.5.4.1 Category 2.4.1: CYCCs are under-resourced**

The researcher has a general feeling that the CYCC establishments should be a model for children living on and off the streets, while helping them reunite with their families to become resilient and thrive in society. In acknowledgment, the importance of the CYCCs' programmes, including temporary housing linked to therapeutic services, cannot be underestimated. The participants' perceptions are that children moving on without further services are likely to return to the streets. For further exploration and analysis, the researcher has come up with two sub-categories: (1) independent living programmes for overage children, and (2) aftercare services for children reuniting with their families.

##### ***Sub-category 2.4.1.1: Independent living programmes for overage children***

Social workers and social auxiliary workers have expressed the challenges social workers have to go through to find alternative accommodations for overage children (18 and older) exiting from CYCCs. They indicated that CYCCs do not have independent living programmes for overage children to become self-reliant.

**SWA:** *I just want to tell you other example of the child that is 18 years old. What happens to her, because she does not have parents or any other relative to*

*accommodate her? And we also help children who come from Tanzania, who come from Congo, who don't have anyone else to turn to for help.*

**SWB:** *That is the most challenge that we have. You work with a child and when she is 18, now what am I going to do? Then you will push the child to the first option she presents to you? If she tells you that she found a friend and you will allow her to go because you don't have an option. Yes, and of which is wrong. Because it might come back to you as a social worker.*

All these views do not mean that the participants are against CYCCs instituting the exit of overage children. Their challenge is that CYCCs are not supposed to discharge children without an independent living programme to minimise the risks of children going back to the streets. Such a programme is a package of training, life skills, and income generating activities (Social Development Department 2023:201). Children are equipped “to meet the demands of adult life, such as how to compile a CV, open a bank account, manage time, cook and provide for oneself” (Mmusi & Van Breda 2017:355). Invoking the ecological systems theory reviewed in Chapter 1 (see Figure 1.3), the researcher realises that, this model is more operational to promote independent living quoting Van Breda (2016:49):

...the Youth Ecological-Resilience Scale that I am using in my research (Van Breda, in press) includes personal (focused on personal agency), environmental (focused on structure) and interactional (focused on the agency-structure interface) variables. The findings from this tool to date show the importance of all three of these dimensions, confirming the necessity to be inclusive and holistic in our approach to the agency-structure debate in both care-leaving and resilience...

It is therefore an unrealistic expectation for social workers to successfully process the exit of overage children who have not gone through proper independent living programmes with the necessary support to exit CYCCs safely. These social workers are faced by the daunting challenge of connecting untrained and unskilled children with job opportunities and permanent housing to prevent them from returning to the streets.

***Sub-category 2.4.1.2: Aftercare services for children reuniting with their families***

The sub-category of the continuum of service challenges from the findings signals a service delivery gap in assisting children to exit from the CYCCs. It appears that there are no concrete aftercare plans or implementation to continue helping the children reunited with parents whose living conditions are precarious and the risks of them returning to the streets are observable.

***SWA:*** *We cannot challenge the presiding officers. To show that the child was not ready and was not prepared, they come back begging to stay. You find children coming back to the centre, running away from home again because the situation home is bad.*

***SAWB:*** *We discuss everything about the exit before making the final decision for a child to go home. A child is happy to go back home and when she gets home the parents are also happy to see their child back home. After a couple of weeks, things make a different turn; a child phones the centre crying that she wants to come back or to talk to social worker...*

***SAWG:*** *Before they give you a child, there are some sessions they give you with the child, and then alone, and counselling and everything. But despite all those, she came back and said, 'you know what, I am experiencing difficulties with this child, I can't deal with her anymore... she does not listen...'*

The study participants are not saying that children are to remain in CYCCs indefinitely to prevent them from running back to the streets. They are implying that children cannot just exit from transitional facilities without a follow-up system and aftercare support services once they have been reunited with their families, and there are more studies on this gap.

An inquiry into “reconnecting with and maintaining family relationships” and “social support networks” echoes the participants’ claims, reemphasising CYCC programmes to integrate aftercare support in combination with formal and informal social networks (Pote, Dykes & Carelse 2022:94).

Another study addressing the juncture between aftercare support services and CYCCs extends its scope to foster care and adoption. Aftercare is promoted as an invaluable component to address the problem of children struggling to adjust in a new cultural environment. A big challenge is when the foster parents have a different cultural background than the foster children and do not allow them to access to their own culture (Du Toit, Van der Westhuizen & Alpaslan 2016:391).

Another challenge is that CYCCs are seen as community facilities, well prepared to link children with families while offering additional social support and networks to ensure that their exit process from transitional services is practical and successful (Pote et al 2022:96).

Considering that each social worker and auxiliary has a story to tell, their views agree with previous studies. CYCCs and aftercare support services exist to journey with all children exiting from transitional programmes and connecting with families, foster care parents, schools, and other stakeholders to promote quality of life for vulnerable children. Bronfenbrenner's microsystem and mesosystem covered in Chapter One is invoked for children to feel supported and their needs are addressed as parents connect well with larger structures beyond their homes.

### **3.6 THEME 3: SOCIAL WORKERS' SOLUTIONS TO PREVENT THE RECURRENCE OF CHILDREN LIVING ON AND OFF THE STREETS**

Beyond the presented social workers' experiences and challenges, the reporting now reaches a watershed moment in the research, seeking to present the solutions that social workers and social auxiliary workers have put forward to prevent the recurrence of children living on and off the streets. The theme is divided into four sub-themes: (1) solutions aligned to families, (2) solutions aligned to the street environment, (3) solutions aligned to the CYCC environment, and (4) solutions aligned to exiting children from CYCCs.

#### **3.6.1 Sub-theme 3.1: Solutions aligned to families**

The first sub-theme is about the participants' views on how family support services may be restructured differently and more intentionally to integrate early interventions in respect of the integrated service delivery model as seen in Chapter One of this study. Social workers and social auxiliary workers introduced some ideas they believe would drastically help reduce the recurrence of children running to the streets via two categories: (1) families at high risk, and (2) early interventions.

### **3.6.1.1 Category 3.1.1: Families at high risk**

The proposed solutions by the social workers and social auxiliary workers fit together with the integrated service delivery model structured for the “families at high risk”. Such risks are, according to the participants, associated with a crisis requiring serious investigations and interventions that may involve the immediate removal of the child and placement into a place safety as a last recourse.

***SWF:** There should not be any delay; if a child needs care and protection, the designated social worker needs to do his or her job of finding alternative care for the child. But also removing the child is not enough. Proper work needs to be done to make sure that the family is a safe place for a child to come back home to, as that child cannot live forever in a place of safety.*

***SWD:** A solution concerning children [living] on and off streets will be to identify those children who are in troublesome families and assist parents to deal with whatever crisis [is being] faced before children could walk to streets.*

The social workers and social auxiliary workers have proposed solutions to families at high risk, aiming to support those parents who are incapable of providing safe home environments in order to prevent their children from running to the streets. This analysis is based on family assessment and early interventions through prevention care services in line with the following inspirations:

Imagine a world where children grow up in communities with dedicated professionals and supports which promote family strengths and individual resiliency, providing proactive responses to early manifestations of risk for future maltreatment. Child maltreatment begins in our communities as a

physical, mental, and public health problem (Roygardner, Palusci, and Hughes 2019:82).

Empowering parents to participate in working toward a long-term solution through various strategies including training and skills development form part of eradicating child maltreatment. However, the researcher's understanding is that parents and CYCC social workers are not working alone in isolation from the community and stakeholders to promote the wellbeing of children. Hence Ncube (2015:89) believes "civil society need to assist communities to set up child protection committees that are accessible for children to report any form of abuse." In respect of seeking to involve community or neighbourhoods, children's rights are addressed while developing a culture of putting the interests of the children first. This expectation also goes with raising an awareness that many times children in families at high risk lack happiness, hugs, love, praise, and appreciation of who they are (Ncube 2015:33).

The above elements are part of a child's emotional support that is fundamental to their growth. The participants' contributions are insightful, as extreme cases of families at high risk may compromise the safety of a child, hence the last solution of taking further steps towards the removal and "*There should not be any delay...*" (SWF).

### **3.6.1.2 Category 3.1.2: Early interventions**

All the social workers and social auxiliary workers interviewed suggested that CYCCs are to have family visit programmes involving different agencies, including community development experts. Such programmes are intended to address early signs of child maltreatment and early interventions among families with moderate risks. Social workers and social auxiliary workers have suggested that many times DSD designated social workers want to respond to child maltreatment when the situation is already dire, whereas it could have been possible to prevent abuse. In their understanding, crisis-driven intervention should apply in its context while working with parents and guardians to prevent all sorts of child maltreatment in their home environment.

**SWB:** *The problem is that designated social workers work with those families who are in deep crisis already. Social workers can always visit children in their homes and*



*help them before the situation is bad. Some parents need parenting skills. Imagine a teenage mother and father and their baby! It is three children looking after one another... Another thing is, we need to know many parents struggle to understand their children when they are in puberty.*

**SWC:** *You can see the signs that a child is being abused. Everyone, including teachers and church members and children themselves, need to be taught and to know what to do when they suspect a child is being abused. If a child is screaming almost every day in the house, you should know that something is wrong in that family and that one day the child will disappear...*

The issue of child maltreatment and abuse is a highly contested topic in the broad family and child wellbeing area of study. Child maltreatment and how it evolves in a family is described as a complex field to understand, because parents and guardians involved do not want to expose their abusive behaviours. And so, defenceless children are subjected to events of emotional neglect, emotional abuse, physical neglect, physical abuse, and sexual abuse that children end up internalising.

Considering section 110 (1) of the Children's Act 38 (2005) and Chapter 1 Table 1 concerning ontogenic, microsystem, ecosystem, and macrosystem theory, addressing child neglect and child maltreatment is in the hands of every single individual in community. In accordance, the law holds accountable in addition to parents, any correctional official, dentist, homeopath, immigration officer, labor inspector, legal practitioner, medical practitioner, midwife, minister of religion, nurse, occupational therapist, physiotherapist, psychologist, religious leader, social service professionals, social worker, speech therapist, teacher, traditional health practitioner, traditional leader or members of staff or volunteer worker and others (Social Development Department 2023:112).

The researcher comments that, the law on reporting any child abuse and maltreatment is straightforward as it does not exempt anyone from protecting at-risk child. One of her concerns is Government's lack of strategy to monitor implementation of the policy document while putting in place mechanism to measure

outcomes. With this determination, the researcher believes Khampepe (2018:488) who shows that Government's policy is not working, hence speaking out:

Children are precious members of our society and any law that affects them must have due regard to their vulnerability and their need for guidance. We have a duty to ensure that they receive the support and assistance that is necessary for their positive growth and development ... We must be careful ... to ensure that, in attempting to guide and protect children, our interventions do not expose them to harsh circumstances which can only have adverse effects on their development."

The intrinsic value of this report is that it provides a tool to show how CYCC social workers can approach the problem and identify likely perpetrators among parents and other family members; caregivers; friends; acquaintances; strangers; teachers, police officers and clergy; employers; healthcare, colleagues and others. Viewing this model in context, caregivers in CYCCs are also sensitised as they receive all the necessary support to fight the scourge of child maltreatment while going beyond to exceed the regulation requirements.

The implications are that social workers and social auxiliary workers' proposed solutions to child maltreatment in the family environment are not just given to recommend a swift placement of maltreated children into a place of safety and protection, but also to engage with parents and guardians on the ideal practice of making homes a safer place for their children to develop and thrive.

### **3.6.2 Sub-theme 3.2: Solutions aligned to the street environment**

Social workers and social auxiliary workers have indicated that the streets are a dangerous place and constitutes a major risk and threat to children who have made it their home. Not only does this unsafe environment expose them to criminals, but it also compromises their health in general, because of exposure to harmful substances, eating rotten food scavenged from public refuse bins, and being exposed to deadly sexually transmitted diseases owing to rapes and prostitution. All these above ill conditions experienced by children living on and off the streets came out in the interviews with participants. The same participants suggested solutions of what should be done in three categories: (1) children living on and off the streets need

safety and protection, (2) there should be drop-in centres with a range of programmes, and (3) social workers need statutory power.

### **3.6.2.1 Category 3.2.1: Children living on and off the streets need safety and protection**

Social workers and social auxiliary workers have commented that the harsh conditions faced by children living on and off the streets means that services should be taken to them. They also suggested service delivery in a street environment should be on a regular basis to provide for the basic needs of the most vulnerable children, like safety and protection, and these services should be provided by a variety of services providers, including health workers.

**SAWG:** *Most importantly the government should implement mobile health services targeting children living [on the] streets and qualified healthcare workers should be deployed to be part of the outreach teams. We need healthcare workers to join us in outreaches... On the other side, the police should make streets safe by confronting drug dealers and other criminals taking advantage of children used to living on streets.*

**SWF:** *Children living on and off the streets fear visiting public health institutions, fearing prejudice and stigma from the public. Perhaps taking services in the streets will make these kids realise there is someone committed to their plight.*

The participants, thinking of the urgent need for safety and protection in the streets, believe that children's right-based solutions provided by the DSD are appropriate. In their plan, they are looking at immediate protection from danger, abuse, and exploitation, but also cover more long-term, proactive approaches designed to promote the development of children's skills and knowledge, build support structures for children, and lessen their vulnerability (Social Development Department 2023:23). All these solutions are more practical if they can be implemented having in place proper mechanisms to ensure that there is accountability among service providers working with CYCCs to fulfil their mandates. Abdi, Saeieh, Roozbeh and Yazdkhasti (2019:3) researched international organisations engaged in different practices. In

their inquiry, they did not mind seeing that many organisations are in fact duplicating services. For instance:

- **Short-term strategies:** identifying street children living on and off streets and making contact with them, creating suitable shelters for them with respect to their conditions, and providing health, education and counselling services for them and their families.
- **Long-term strategies:** addressing public's attitude against children living on and off street, and offering social and financial assistance for poor and vulnerable families, early interventions to support families with high risks of children neglect, integrating children living on and off streets in social activities and decision making, establish and implement independent living plan to break the cycle.

A pattern established by all the above organisations is the spirit of teamwork and a deep sense of passion for children living on the streets, which is relatively relevant in the social work industry. In the context of CYCCs, social workers in a team of dedicated service providers will feel strongly motivated. Without an ideal workplace environment, frustrations will unleash distress, which will make it very difficult to prevent the recurrence of children living on and off the street.

### **3.6.2.2 Category 3.2.2: There should be drop-in centres with a range of programmes**

The idea of equipped drop-in centres was mentioned to promote an open space for care workers to engage with street children. Social workers and social auxiliary workers have also mentioned the advantages of these establishments to build a strong connection with children living on and off the streets in various ways:

**SAWG:** *For these children living on and off streets, one of the solutions that I see is for the government and NPOs to capacitate drop-in centres in terms of funding and different programmes to address their needs. We have two drop-in centres in this city of Pretoria, but they are ill equipped. Some of their needs are spiritual caregivers,*

*trained people to promote sports, providing play and entertainment facilities, language skills, food parcels, parental skills, children's dialogue, children's rights, family reunifications, discussions about drug addictions, shower facilities...*

**SWF:** *I feel the same way. Medical clinics are needed in community with more range of services. Drop-in centres for streets children are also needed and should be taken seriously to respond to specific needs.*

Participant SAWG states: *"We have two drop-in centres in this city... but they are ill-equipped"*. This suggestion was promoted in the literature to support the NGOs involved in drop-in centres with a mandate of safety and protection for all children walking through their doors. The government is persuaded to fund multifaceted services for the facilities to meet the needs of children living on the streets. That funding will be enough to address the social workers' challenges regarding the shortage of specialist services for children (Phaswana & Erlank 2023:59). The report is advocating for the implementation of directives from the National Childcare and Protection Policy, acknowledging, "there is very little management infrastructure to support the planning, delivery and oversight of childcare and protection services" (DSD 2019:105). The policy gives more directives considering the following areas (DSD 2019:105):

- Staff trained and tasked to coordinate, manage, and oversee service delivery, including ensuring the provision of materials for government-run or supported services and programmes;
- office space and equipment, such as computers;
- transport and vehicles;
- child-friendly spaces; and
- an integrated case management system.

These points and others not directly addressed in the policy agree with the participants' suggestion to provide equipped drop-in centres. Besides the government's support, stakeholders are directly motivated to support the mandate of safety and protection of children living on and off the streets until the ideal goal of leaving the streets is achieved.

### **3.6.2.3 Category 3.2.3: Social workers need statutory power**

CYCC social workers have been operating in a more limiting environment without full support or authority to act in the best interests of street children found in emergency need during outreaches. They believe that if power can be delegated to them to place children in places of safety and protection, tracking service delivery to children on the streets will be easier without having to wait for long processes and protocols involving designated social workers.

***SWE:** There are two different things that need to be solved for the work of social workers and children. One, we need to be given the authority to remove the children from streets to children centres [CYCCs]. We take children who need care and protection to designated social workers. Sitting with a child only once in her office, designated social workers sometimes do not understand the circumstances of children. Authorising outreach social workers to remove children from the street will make the work easier and many children will be helped.*

The storyline advocates for CYCC social workers to be recognised with substantive authority to make decisions to place children in CYCCs to avoid frustrations from the bureaucratic process of the DSD. The participant's suggestion conflicts with sections 150 - 160 of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 that gives the responsibility of the removal of a child to temporary safe care to the DSD's appointed social worker or the police only. "A person authorised by a court order, a designated social worker or a police official who removes a child and places such child in temporary safe care..." (Social Development Department 2023:150-160).

Early studies on the implementation of the regulation are proposing a change, describing "the current approach for placing children at a CYCC as being chaotic, rushed, 'drop and go', rushing off to the next crisis, paperwork focused, and disturbing to see the lack of emotional connectedness..." (Hope & Van Wyk 2018:428). Instead of applying the legislation in the context, "current interventions are rushed, crisis orientated and resulting in insufficient emotional care directed towards the child" (Hope & Van Wyk 2018:432).

Other studies proposing that CYCC social workers should have statutory authority mention that the power inequality between them and the placement social workers from the DSD exacerbates the problem faced by CYCCs, resulting in punishing children in need of urgent care (Dimba-Ndalen et al 2022:67).

The researcher's position about the CYCC social workers and social auxiliary workers asking for statutory power is that it is not a bad idea, given the urgency of vulnerable children living on and off the streets. It is also suggested that a teamwork-based solution with the spirit of collaboration is the ideal practice. The DSD will be more proactive to work closely with CYCCs, ensuring that an enabling environment for the residential CYCC social workers is created for them to improve the delivery of prevention care services.

### **3.6.3 Sub-theme 3.3: Solutions aligned to the CYCC environment**

In this sub-theme presenting social workers' solutions to children residing in the CYCC institutions, three categories were established and developed: (1) a review of the current model of intake for children, (2) multidisciplinary team to work in CYCCs, and (3) managing heavy caseloads.

#### **3.6.3.1 Category 3.3.1: A review of the current model of intake for children**

The researcher has previously noted with concern a tension arising from the implementation of the regulation limiting statutory work and the removal of children to designated social workers and the police. Suggesting changes for the current practices to alleviate frustrations in the CYCCs' operations, social workers and social auxiliary workers would like a new approach of intake with clearly defined roles and responsibilities while ensuring supervision, monitoring, and accountability from the DSD. According to the participants, a high level of accountability is required from them. They are expected to have each child's file containing his or her background and circumstances they faced when living on the street.

***SWC:** Our intake procedures need to be reviewed. The designated social workers and CYCC social workers needs to work together to make sure that a child has a proper file, the best interests and children's right of the child are respected, proper investigations are done and justice towards the child is done. Communication and*

*respect between the designated social worker from the Department of Social Development and the CYCC social workers are very important.*

**SWE:** *CYCCs should see to it that they do a proper screening of children before admitting them. I am saying that because when designated social workers call, they are desperate for a space or sometimes they really don't know the child that well, that sometimes they give you criteria that are not correct.*

Section 155-159 of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 (Social Development Department 2023:155-159) offers directives for the children's intake to alternative care and a list of practices that should be considered to reach this objective. Among other activities, designated social workers are to ensure that the children's intake is completed and each child's file reflects, first of all, the particulars of the designated social worker concerned. Subsequently, the following duties are suggested to improve a good working relationship with a child's parent, guardian, or caregiver (Social Development Department 2023:155-159):

- Counselling;
- mediation;
- prevention and early intervention services;
- family reconstruction and rehabilitation;
- behaviour modification;
- problem solving; and
- referral to another suitably qualified person or organisation.

Despite the Children's Act 38 of 2005 stating that intake is a core function, placement social workers are not performing their duties as expected. Instead, they are expecting CYCCs to trace the child's family themselves and must remind them of the expiry dates of the court orders, among other important statutory responsibilities (Dimba-Ndalen et al. 2022:65).

Social workers and social auxiliary workers' suggested solution to review the current children's intake approach is validated through previous research ((Dimba-Ndalen et al. 2022:66).) that promotes a high level of supervision and accountability. Proper



supervision of all the statutory work processes is a sign a system is in place compelling the DSD and CYCCs to interact in various ways for social workers mandated to deliver professional services to get all the support required to perform their duties without frustrations.

### **3.6.3.2 Category 3.3.2: Multidisciplinary team to work in CYCCs**

Social workers and social auxiliary workers are suggesting that CYCCs should consider sourcing out the multidisciplinary team with diverse experiences and expertise in the broader field of child protection to deliver tailor-made, integrated, and holistic prevention care services. The participants expressed their views as follows:

**SWE:** *Social workers are not trained to address all the problems children living in CYCCs face. There is a need for psychologists, pastoral caregivers for spiritual support, nurses, advocates, community workers, tutors, and the like. All these skills are needed to prevent children's recurrence on streets.*

**SWF:** *Children are dealing with different issues and some of them are not for a social worker to find a solution. I suggest CYCCs to hire other staff members to cover those other areas...*

Although the existing literature does not cover more about the usefulness and impact of having multidisciplinary workers in the CYCCs' operations, the legislation refers to "an assessment of the therapeutic, educational, cultural, linguistic, developmental, socio economical and spiritual needs of the child" (Social Development Department 2023:201). In respect of this mandate, the participants are indicating that they can deliver more positive results by working together with a multidisciplinary team possessing different skills and knowledge of holistic needs and circumstances of children living on and off the streets. This solution is in line with the ecosystems approach highlighting that social workers' roles are interdependent with the function of other systems. They "cannot effectively render social work services to the children without the provision of support by the other systems" (Phaswana & Erlank 2023:58).

The integrated service delivery model, known as the pyramid of prevention services, also helps to validate the participants' suggestion because it calls on joint action and

the involvement of more professionals from diverse disciplines to respond to the plight of children in CYCCs.

### **3.6.3.3 Category 3.3.4: Managing heavy caseloads**

Responding to the challenge of heavy caseloads, the participants suggested that the DSD can review its current funding model to adopt a different one that will enable the CYCCs to afford employing enough social workers to ease the burden caused by heavy caseloads. More details regarding their suggestions are directly cited.

**SWD:** *What solutions are you looking for? The only thing that can reduce my stress is at least to have other two social workers to work with me. Then I can give my attention to each child.*

**SWA:** *In my opinion, I think If one social worker has over 20 children, then there should be social auxiliary worker to help. Especially the admin work is too much for social workers that they don't get a chance to concentrate on children.*

**SWF:** *In fact, DSD knows we are not coping with the caseload, but they do not give us enough funding to get more social workers. I must sacrifice the time for my own family to push the work of the centre which I think is somehow not professional at all...*

Several publications agree with the participants to reduce the pressure of heavy caseloads within the CYCCs, because it debases social workers by not allowing them to bring in a combination of their knowledge and skills to deliver services to children effectively.

The change proposed in the literature is the introduction of a multi-stakeholder's engagement into the situation holistically to address understaffing, staff turnover, poor teamwork, and inadequate funding within the CYCCs. Social workers will not be employed to deal with supervising caregivers, "but rather themselves access professional supervision by a registered social worker to clarify their responsibilities and ensure optimal services to the children" (Dimba-Ndalen et al 2022:67).

But also, social workers will not be subjected to caseloads that exceed the standard practice prescribed ratio of one social worker for 30 children, to ensure that social work services are efficient and effective (Phaswana & Erlank 2023:59).

In an alignment with international practices the literature stresses that “increased demand for social work services, shortage of qualified social workers, high workloads, inadequate resources and retention problems, contribute to additional pressure on existing staff and have implications for policy, practice and research in social work” (McFadden, Maclochlainn, Manthorpe, Naylor, Schroder, McGrory, Ravalier, Nicholl, Currie, Kirby and Davies 2024:1966).

From the evidence based-research, heavy caseloads among CYCC social workers can be addressed effectively and in various ways. And so, the participants’ examples are eye-opening to see what can practically be done to turn the situation around.

#### **3.6.4 Sub-theme 3.4: Solutions aligned to exiting children from CYCCs**

The sub-theme is a turning point in the study offering a bigger picture of the participants’ solutions, showing how care services can be differently rendered to prevent children’s movement to the streets when they are transitioning from CYCC facilities. These solutions take cognisance of a successful exit for children to avoid recurrence and to become more resilient to thrive, as unpacked in three categories: (1) independent living, (2) full integration of children, and (3) transitional service policy.

##### **3.6.4.1 Category 3.4.1: Independent living**

In essence, children exiting from the CYCCs should not return to the streets. It is expected that they would have gone through diverse programmes in preparation for independent living, applying different strategies encapsulated in the three sub-categories: (1) longer-term housing, (2) skills development, and (3) mentoring children.

##### ***Sub-category 3.4.1.1: Longer-term housing***

Social workers and social auxiliary workers believe children who have already reached 18 years of age are relatively young and can therefore be assisted to get a longer-term transitional housing, allowing children to continue rebuilding their lives.

**SWC:** *The right thing to do for our children who exit CYCCs is for the government to provide housing where the children will live independently, being supported by social workers to make sure that they are able to live independently. The supervision can be a process of few years as children get reintegrated into community life.*

**SAWG:** *Since CYCCs are temporary residential care homes, the government should investigate a different model supporting children leaving the shelters to live and develop themselves with a little support until independent living is achieved.*

An assessment of the above perceptions shows the pressure the CYCC social workers face to secure alternative accommodation for children whose extension is not permitted in terms of the temporary residence care policy. Hence, another type of housing model with advanced support services suited to the needs and circumstances of children who are no longer in the care of the DSD and the court is proposed.

As indicated earlier, longer-term housing provision beyond CYCC transition is an important field, though under-researched. Where this service is advocated, it is advocated as integral to independent living through clear policy guidelines. Some of the children have not been able to complete their education and skills training to secure employment and require more support, notably housing, to navigate life (Pote et al 2022:86).

An alternative housing solution after exiting CYCCs is regarded as part of implementing the National Youth Development Strategy. Its principles target vulnerable youths between 18 and 28 years old. It would work well with employment programmes, such as the Expanded Public Works Programme, through which a source of income for youth is created to access subsidised housing to make the ideal objective of independent living realistic (Fredericks 2018:16).

Paired with the participants' housing solution, these above findings are an affirmation of a continuum of services beyond exiting CYCCs to envision quality of life. It is an extension of care, but to be managed and monitored at an advanced level appreciating children's responsibilities and potential to contribute to independent living.

#### ***Sub-category 3.4.1.2: Skills development***

The participants came up with skills development and training solutions with an expectation that agencies working with CYCCs should help find a balance between implementing crisis interventions and mainstream prevention programmes. Findings indicated that though very much needed in that context, the temporary nature of care services tends to overshadow skills development and training. Social workers and social auxiliary workers want to work toward sending children from the streets not only to CYCCs, but also to their families, which is difficult to attain in an environment that does not create opportunities for them to fight their cause.

***SWF:*** *We are only focusing on emergencies and that becomes our almost every day's responsibilities. There are supposed to be some skills that are appropriate for grown up kids approaching 18 years and upwards. Like basic computer skills, driver's license, baking, sewing, carpentry, security, and the like, to help them easily find jobs that will help them to survive.*

***SAWH:*** *Our organisations does not have enough funds and logistics to help in the areas of skills development for children. In my view DSD should make skills development compulsory and they should provide adequate means to enforce the implementation.*

For additional insights, the relevant literature cited echoes the participants' perceptions regarding the notion of skills development implementation to rebuild the lives of children transitioning out of care centres. "In essence, there needs to be a good balance between the psychosocial interventions and the life skills programmes presented to youth by their respective CYCCs" (Fredericks 2018:16).

Matching findings from both the participants and the cited literature, there are more opportunities embedded in the move-on programmes for children who should adjust in society beyond their temporary stay in a CYCC. CYCCs are encouraged to invest more in life skills activities than they do in psychological and therapeutic interventions associated with childcare and protection.

That integration is also reflected in recent studies the theme such as *“Social support networks for youths aging out of residential care to promote positive transition outcomes”* by Pote et al (2022:84) is acknowledged for further observations and analysis. Under this same topic, life skills are implemented with other activities, opening more opportunities for children’s personal growth, development of resilience, and independent living (Pote et al 2022:95).

Another study underpinning life skills development-based solutions to transitioning out of residential care and interdependent living advises children to resist the rules set to push them out of the place of care if they have not prepared. “There is a sudden dawning that she or he must leave and that something must be done... The Children’s Act 38 of 2005 permits youth to remain in care beyond 18 years of age...” (Moodley et al 2018:7).

The last report encourages children to stay in the CYCCs and leave when they are prepared and there is a safe exit plan, which supports social workers and social auxiliary workers’ proposed solution to invest more efforts in skills development. Their major concern is a cycle of running on and off the streets that will be difficult to end without finding a mechanism prioritising independent living.

#### ***Sub-category 3.4.1.3: Mentoring children***

Over and above longer-term housing and life skills development, the participants suggested mentoring as an additional activity to promote the concept of independent living among the children exiting from CYCCs. They believe social work services should be extended to continue journeying with children to reach a high degree of independent living and integration in the community.

**SWA:** *Each child exiting CYCCs facilities, including those who are 18 years old and beyond, I believe should be assigned a community worker who will make sure that there is a positive progress in that child's life.*

**SAWG:** *Children leaving CYCCs and who are aged some of them might be lucky to get job opportunities. Since they have been receiving everything for free while in the shelters, there is a need to mentor them, because you find they need proper advice and counselling in many areas as they approach a new life they were not used to.*

The model of mentoring as presented by the participants to benefit overaged children moving out of the CYCCs is very clear in the literature and its main purpose is to promote positive transition outcomes. Mamelani Projects in Cape Town is investing in mentoring children after they have moved out of CYCCs and has made significant progress to achieve independent living. Responsible social workers are assisting children/youth to build goals matching with future careers and aspirations, helping address the identified needs. Realising positive results, social workers are now calling on the government to extend the Foster Child Grant to the CYCC transition process, covering children from 18 years old (Pote et al 2022:95).

Elsewhere in the literature advocating mentoring children, section 212 of the Children's Amendment Act 41 of 2007 is invoked to encourage all the CYCCs countrywide to embark on developing an independent living plan for children because "the need of alternative care is increasing in South Africa" (Phaswana & Erlank 2023:58). Mentoring children is to be planned and implemented with social support networks focusing on transitions to adulthood. As such, successful mentorship will be measured based on educational achievement and youth being employed while accessing housing will enhance their wellbeing and quality of life in general (Pote et al 2022:95).

Factually, the findings demonstrate how the process of mentoring children is critical and vitally important for the independent living process while connecting children to get more community support that will sustain them beyond exiting from the CYCCs.

#### **3.6.4.2 Category 3.4.2: Full integration of children**

The study participants believe that a full family integration of children living on and off the streets should be prioritised to pursue a long-lasting solution. When the participants proposed this solution, the researcher began to develop a good grasp of the reality of the cycle of children living on and off the streets and concluded that it is literally a reflection of family brokenness. The implications are that it does not matter how much social workers can put into their journey with children for their full integration, because the lack of a holistic support system will be a setback. To make sense of the application of the full integration-based solution through a broader social network and connection to community resources approach, the researcher deduced three sub-categories: (1) family resilience, (2) educational support, and (3) Transitional Service Policy.

#### ***Sub-category 3.4.2.1: Family resilience***

The participants have confirmed that for families living in extreme poverty without employment or other means of income generation that a household needs to make ends meet, the full integration of children exiting from CYCCs will not be achieved. They proposed the solution of introducing a practical family support system, where parents see that the CYCCs' assistance is extended to the family environment while rooting out the cause of the recurrence of their children living on and off the streets.

***SWC:*** *Children hate staying home without food because their parents cannot afford to buy it. If these parents can be assisted with food parcels for a certain period until they get their own income, children will not develop a street life of begging.*

***SWF:*** *I am also thinking of how as social workers we work with agencies and business owners through DSD and CYCCs to connect financially struggling parents with housing and job opportunities.*

Pondering on the above quotations, it became clear to the researcher that the participants are attempting to expose many years of the government failing to acknowledge the urgency of push factors behind the recurrence of children living on and off the streets. It is not surprising that in the national norms and standards for CYCCs sections 191-212 of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 monitoring the establishment of these social entities and effective service delivery, full integration



and family resilience have not been highlighted (Social Development Department 2023:136).

Yet, the UN guidelines for the alternative care of children is straightforward in calling on member states to adopt in their domestic policies for family resilience. This global approach presented in the fashion of a pyramid of integrated services has multifaceted, intertwined solutions applicable in family strengthening services, such as parenting courses and sessions, the promotion of positive parent-child relationships, conflict resolution skills, opportunities for employment and income generation and, where required, social assistance (World Health Organisation 2023:15).

The researcher argues that the global model that has been tested should be further investigated to find out how it can be launched locally with proper monitoring and supervision mechanisms to address the recurrence of children living on and off the streets. She invokes the ecosystem of families with high risks and holistic integrated services (Chapter One, Figure 1.1) and the microsystems of immediate environment linking with macrosystems and connections (Chapter One, Figure 1.2). The government's policies affect the delivery of community services at the micro and macro levels. Politicians have a big influence in the government sphere and are among key stakeholders who should be the mouthpiece of children living on and off the streets to lobby for change, in order to achieve full integration in the family and society as a whole. Spicker (2022:158:) and his model of the general model of social welfare service principle (Chapter One, Table 1.2) is inspirational. The government is not operating in isolation, since public sectors, private companies, voluntary organisations, private businesses, and formal and informal entities will combine their efforts and resources to contribute to rebuilding resilient families. A discussion on policy issues resurfaces in sub-category 3.4.2.3 specifically to analyse social workers' proposed solutions to transitional services for overage children exiting CYCCs.

#### ***Sub-category 3.4.2.2: Educational support***

As generated from the findings, the risks of dropping out of school for the children exiting from CYCCs are quite high and the reasons behind it vary given each child's

circumstances and the environment surrounding them. Suggesting solutions, social workers and social auxiliary workers are putting the responsibility on CYCCs working with the DSD and universities to support children transitioning from the care centres to develop their academic careers.

**SAWG:** *Children who are enrolled in tertiary education some have university bursaries, other do not have, but in all also the cases a support is required as some of them do not even have families to go during holidays. Somebody needs to stand with them as their parents to see that they can survive independently.*

**SWA:** *We are trying our best to find schools of children to go to schools and the shelter is trying its best to provide the school materials to encourage everyone to go to school. But after writing their matric exams, there is no more relationship. We see some of them coming back to us on holidays to ask for accommodation and food.*

The participants are capitalising on educational care support to really demonstrate a need for a strategy with clear guidelines to place children in the interactive circle of care within the CYCCs' transitional aftercare system. It is clear that the interviewed social workers and social auxiliary workers want the extension of care services that will be rendered to enhance academic careers and future employment opportunities. The participants' thinking can be further expanded under considerations of the previous reports where researchers recorded perceptions of children who have exited from CYCCs.

In a phenomenological study involving seven youth who had left residential care, educational progress was impeded by numerous social and psychological problems. Events of discrimination associated with having been in shelters are noted. "Difficulties in relationships with friends and lovers often concern the stigma of having been in care...." (Kelly, Van Breda, Pinkerton, Frimpong-Manso, Chereni & Bukuluki 2023:8).

Other important issues highlighted are a lack of independent living and social skills, the abrupt ending of social support, lack of trust, and a feeling of loneliness, among others (Van Breda & Dickens 2016:8).

Further reports indicated that a solid foundation and pathways of life have been already built for children to see a bright and prosperous future while in places of care. And “having remained resilient through most of the challenges that they encountered in care. They did not run away and return to the streets” (Maseko 2017:90).

One can respond that if psychosocial problems are not attended to and children’s background is used against them, clearly the findings warn that a feeling of not fit for a purpose may develop regardless of academic efforts to rise above vulnerability. The participants’ proposal of taking educational care support for children/youth seriously once out of the CYCCs is not to nurture a dependency syndrome. In this trajectory, Van Breda and Dickens (2016:91-92) reflects on social workers who want to develop core competencies and specialisation in educational support beyond the transition out of CYCCs. Some of the suggested areas are linkage with community services, career development and guidance, work readiness, helping to achieve one’s goals, funding quality education, and student counselling.

### ***Sub-category 3.4.2.3: Transitional Service Policy***

All the participants agree that a new policy and procedures oriented to the pathways of life should be drafted and implemented to ensure that children transitioning out of CYCCs are fully supported with measurable objectives and positive outcomes to prevent recurrence on the streets.

***SAWH:*** *There is a need for a new policy... that will take into consideration children who turn 18 years old and have no alternative place to go to... immediately DSD gets a report that a child has finished matric they stop funding and any other support, a child has to stand in the court alone as an adult... this is a big burden to social worker...*

***SWA:*** *My opinion concerning the children who exit the shelter is that the government should have another programme that will make sure that the children live independently without depending on a childcare worker. Such programmes are such as housing or internships that are created specifically for youth who exit from CYCCs.*

*In addition, this should be incorporated in the policy to make sure that they are implemented.*

Looking at all the elements constituting the generic theme of the study and the findings, there is a need to have a policy as a guideline to monitor cluster services to children moving out of the CYCCs. The researcher states that expected services cannot be successfully delivered in a piecemeal fashion without a proper structure together with overall strategy for smooth integration and coordination. She does not, however, imply that informal support services should stop, which is a separate discussion.

Introduction of a policy on transitional services is explored looking at the work of Kelly et al (2023:14): “Greater efforts are needed at policy, practice, and community levels to bolster care-leavers’ relational connectedness.”

These above reports echo Campo and Commerford (2016:9), who recommend that a policy on transitional care services should be implemented: “Despite state and national government commitment to better support young people leaving care evidence suggests there are continuing shortfalls in policy and legislation.” In response, the Transitional Service Policy was introduced after extensive research with recommendations that “children and young people in OOHC [out-of-home care] are one of the most vulnerable, disadvantaged and traumatised populations in the Australian community” (Campo & Commerford 2016:9).

In England, the transitional residential care policy debate started gaining momentum after many criticisms culminating in extreme views, including a need to phase the temporary care centres out of the child welfare system. Quoting Hart, La Valle and Holmes (2015:11), “rather than eliminating residential care, what needs to be eliminated is ‘bad’ practice, and residential services should be reconfigured so that they can effectively meet the needs of children who, for a range of reasons, need a residential placement.”

Subsequently, the following recommendations from Hart, La Valle & Holmes (2015:15) are insightful and applicable in the context of this present study:

- The idea of a continuum also needs to extend to the way services are delivered, with less rigid barriers between types of setting, more family involvement and more continuity in interventions before, during and after placement (2015:15).
- A continuum of care includes providing post-placement support to ensure that gains made during the residential placement are sustained, although there are methodological challenges in disentangling the effects of what happened in the placement from the effectiveness of the aftercare support (2015:69).
- Residential care should be seen as part of a continuum of care which is needs-led rather than service-led, and with regular assessment and monitoring to ensure that children's needs are met.
- Providing a continuum of care and holistic care – residential care staff must work effectively with professionals outside the settings who support children before, after and during a placement (2015:76-77).
- It is expected that some children go home from residential care; whereas those that cannot go home will be assisted to access another placement or be placed into independent accommodation (2015:90).

Local researchers are also seriously criticising the credibility of temporary residential care to serve as a bridge to independent living once children have exited from the system. The following reports paint a bigger picture of the structural issues involved:

- “The abrupt end of formal support and resources enjoyed in care puts the care leavers at risk of poverty and social exclusion...” (Van Breda & Dickens 2016:8). A dilemma here is that while not yet ready to start a new life, “they have difficulties in getting jobs because they lack social connections. Not having jobs affects their ability to meet their housing, education, and health needs, forcing some to turn to crime and prostitution to survive” (Frimpong-Manso 2018:53).

- “Care-leavers are without doubt a highly vulnerable population, with literature consistently reporting poor outcomes in the areas of education, employment and mental health...” (Van Breda & Hlungwani 2019:606).
- “In addition to the common transitional challenges facing care-leavers across the globe, the lack of policies and legislation that mandate transitional services creates a challenge for South African care-leavers” (Van Breda & Dickens 2016:9).

A lesson to learn is that in developed countries, transitional residence care services have been under rigorous scrutiny. What stands out to model good practices is that residential care workers are called work effectively with professionals and stakeholders who support children before, after and during a placement. This recommendation is expressively advocated under the continuum of care approach that the researcher strongly believes can work well for the CYCCs, based on her findings. Respectively, a proposed policy on transitional service is motivated and benchmarked to build a model where there will be a deployment of more professionals and trained caregivers to support social workers involved in prevention care services to children living on and off the streets. The policy solution is also factored in with an understanding that it can help monitor the integration of the wholistic services (see Figure 1.1), which the researcher boldly believes binds CYCCs to restructure their services to children recognising families with low risk factors, families with moderate risk factors, and families with high risk factors.

### **3.7 CHAPTER SYNTHESIS**

This chapter is central to the fulfilment of the objectives of the study, as it has essentially integrated the insights processed from the findings into the main theme that led the entire investigation. The chapter has used previous research which factually helped contribute through personal observations and analysis of the empirical findings.

Accordingly, these findings are in connection with social workers' experiences, challenges, and solutions to render prevention care services to children living on and off the streets, which were assessed to gain more knowledge.

The study focus, namely the assessment of social workers' experiences, challenges, and solutions, brought to the fore families with high risks and a need to work along with parents to prevent child maltreatment, which is a major contributing factor to children living on and off the streets. This solution does not however mean that services to ensure early intervention in families with medium risks are not necessary. Subsequently, in view of children's environment in the streets, the participants' solutions address the issues of safety and protection while working towards a negotiated permanent solution that includes the removal and placement into alternative care. In view of CYCCs' transitional care and exit procedure, the participants believe there should be a policy in place to monitor a smooth process and institute a continuum of services toward independent living. All these perceptions are central in Chapter Four, which is dedicated to the general conclusion and recommendations for the future considerations.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

The fourth chapter constitutes the final component serving as the summary, conclusions, and recommendations of the study exploring in-depth knowledge around CYCC social workers' experiences, challenges, and solutions to children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane, Gauteng Province, South Africa. The main objective of undertaking this important study was to explore and describe the experiences, challenges, and solutions of social workers in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria. To keep up with the deadline for the final submission while remaining focused on the core study objectives, not all the themes generated from the study findings were contemplated. The leftover themes were incorporated to become future research topics, should an opportunity arise to pursue further studies. The leftover themes could also be used for articles in academic journals. Whereas Chapter One dealt with the general introduction and background of the research, Chapter Two covered the application of the research methodology. Chapter Three presented the field research findings and literature control. Chapter Four is dedicated to the summary, conclusions, and recommendations.

### **4.2 CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

With the above remarks in mind Chapter One is a crucial component, serving as the main foundation of the entire study project. Given its status of the general introduction, it has substantially offered the background of the main theme and drew on a wide range of the relevant literature reviews undertaken at the initial stage before navigating the field research. Such reviews were done interacting with local and international scholars, since the study pertained to scientific research. In end, the researcher conceptualised social workers' experiences, challenges, and solutions in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria. She came to the realisation that the problem was not an isolated



phenomenon in the City of Tshwane. In fact, she was astonished to encounter the limited publications that directly address the focus of the study topic. Consequently, it is stated that one of the study's underlying limitations is that social workers' experiences, challenges, and solutions were explored in the absence of official statistics on how many children are living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria. To move forward, the project was structured by mainly constructing the research question and its sub-questions, goals, and objectives together with the theological framework as guiding principle for the author to contribute to the existing knowledge about social workers' experiences, challenges, and solutions in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in Tshwane. The other crucial elements constituting the general introduction are the design and methodology combined with the research ethics and clearance from the UNISA College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

#### **4.3 CHAPTER TWO: APPLICATION OF THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Chapter Two emerged from the study's introductory chapter. It is a continuation with a deeper commitment aimed at developing insights about the research methodology and the preliminary information on how the researcher intended to lead the study successfully. To this effect, the qualitative research methodology was retrieved from the literature and was followed to explore and describe the experiences, challenges, and solutions of social workers in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria. This itinerary was followed by the research approach to lead the exploration of the topic with an open-minded spirit to produce quality research output. Other invaluable elements of the chapter's structure were the research design, methods, population, sampling, data collection, piloting, data analysis process, documentation, conceptualisation, coding, categorising, and data verification strategies. On the whole, without methodology it could have been a fruitless exercise to lead the overall objectives of the study without a tool to manage the fieldwork and data processing and then draw factual conclusions and recommendations.

#### **4.4 CHAPTER THREE: THE FIELD RESEARCH FINDINGS AND LITERATURE CONTROL**

Chapter Three is a hallmark of the study given its status of reflecting the empirical findings report. Its development became possible by applying the research findings critically and systematically in line with the main theme and its key elements of social workers' experiences, challenges, and solutions in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets. Engagement with previous research shows that the researcher was not just aiming to report on her findings without interpretation, which would have been a grave weakness in an academic paper of this high calibre.

Reverting to the study methodology followed, the principles of the validity and credibility of data became operational while interrogating the previous and recent publications together with the ecological systems framework. The scrutiny confirms that the researcher was not a passive observer, but an active engaged participant contributing to the development of the study topic in more reflective ways. This commitment is demonstrated through her ability to process the findings to a vital generative stage. Thus, three leading themes are regarded as the anchor of the chapter.

Theme 1 covered social workers' experiences of prevention services to children living on and off the streets. Its four sub-themes dealt with social workers' experiences in the family environment, social workers' experiences in the street environment, social workers' experiences in the CYCCs, and social workers' experiences of different ways to exit children from the CYCCs.

Theme 2 presented a report on social workers' challenges related to prevention service delivery to children living on and off the streets. Four sub-themes identified in this section profiled social workers' challenges in the family environment, challenges in the street environment, challenges in the CYCC environment, and related to children exiting from CYCCs.

As for Theme 3, social workers' solutions to prevent the recurrence of children living on and off the streets emerged. Its four sub-themes profiled solutions aligned to the family environment, solutions aligned to the street environment, solutions aligned to children in the CYCC environment, and solutions aligned to exiting children from

CYCCs. The categories and sub-categories enabled the researcher to integrate the storylines and analysis, as well as come up with the key study recommendations. One of these recommendations is constant collaboration between CYCC social workers and their DSD social worker counterparts as the key for a smooth and successful intake of children. Another recommendation gives a bigger picture of how boldly CYCC care services should be restructured with a transitional service policy guideline aimed to end the cycle of children living on and off the streets, recognising the four identified environments of families, streets, CYCCs, and exit process to reassure children.

On whole, the exploration of social worker's experiences, challenges, and solutions in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets included contributions from the social auxiliary workers. Although the scope of their responsibilities is not exactly like social workers, when it comes to interaction with children in the four reported environments, namely families, streets, CYCCs, and exit process, they are also on the frontline.

#### **4.5 CHAPTER FOUR: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In the last chapter the executive summary, conclusions, and recommendations of the entire research project are presented. The presentation goes beyond summarising the main study's arguments to proposing recommendations for future change in relation to social workers' challenges and solutions to rendering prevention care services to children living on and off the streets. Since it became clear to the researcher that the theme is under-researched, she was motivated to make some proposals for future research projects. Along these lines, more topics have emerged, but because of time constraints the uncovered themes will be considered should there be an opportunity to pursue further studies. As recorded earlier, an area of greater interest is a CYCC policy regarding prevention and aftercare services and the mental health circumstances of children living on and off the streets, among other under-researched fields worth considering for further studies.

The summary, conclusions, and recommendations of the study will now be presented.

#### **4.6 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS RELATED TO THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY APPLIED IN THE STUDY**

This section notes the summary of the qualitative research that set the tone of the dissertation in terms of its structure and design direction. It includes the conclusions and recommendations regarding the application of the qualitative research methodology as applied to enrich the development of the study (see Chapter Two).

##### **4.6.1 Summary of the research methodology applied**

The study used qualitative research methodology to collect data from the fieldwork, which was a base to develop the study about social workers' experiences, challenges, and solutions in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane, Gauteng Province. The researcher's interest in employing the qualitative research process stemmed from an in-depth review of the literature with a particular focus on Creswell (2021:247) and his collaborators to understand how they apply the methodology in the field research process (see Chapter One, section 1.7 and Chapter Two, section 2.12). The process helped the researcher to gain helpful insights that she used during her interviews with participants to get to the reality of the issues concerning experiences, challenges, and solutions in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets. She looked at all the issues involved in the theme in a more holistic and integrated manner, seeking to mediate between the respondents' views and the literature theories. Her aim was to develop a broader understanding with diverse and rich information for her paper to contribute as a model for managers of CYCCs to note and reflect on what their social workers go through. Chapter One, section 1.7.3.9 and Chapter Two, section 2.3.1.6, offer details on data verification approaches used to ascertain the accuracy and correctness of the data. It was enriching to invoke the relevant literature reviews in analysis to enhance the reliability and future applicability of the final report. The research respondents comprised six social workers and two social auxiliary workers, all in all totalling eight study participants involved in various

CYCCs around Tshwane (see Chapter Three, Table 3.1). The method of data collection was semi-structured, face-to-face interviews, as referred to in Chapter One, section 1.7.3.5 and Chapter Two, section 2.8. Throughout the whole process, the researcher ensured compliance with research ethics, as reflected in Chapter One, section 1.8, including informed consent, confidentiality and privacy, anonymity, management of information, and debriefing of participants. The coordinator of the CYCC forum was engaged to be the research gatekeeper. In acknowledgment, she has played the facilitating role of connecting the researcher to the CYCC organisations that were used for population sampling. Before dealing with the actual interviews, the researcher undertook to administer pilot interviews with two social workers from two different CYCCs (see Chapter Two, section 2.6). This process was deemed an integral component of the study to produce valid and reliable final report results regarding the study topic. All the interview reports as captured through the recording tools were transcribed to make a proper analysis and interpretation during the crucial stage of data processing. More details can be found in Chapter One, section 1.7.3.9.

#### **4.6.2 Conclusions relating to the qualitative research process**

Beyond the research methodology summary, the researcher cannot conclude without acknowledging the fieldwork, which was done during difficult times when the country was wrestling with the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic. The researcher carried on with the project and ensured full compliance with the government's rules and protocols that were put in place to control the spread of the infection (see Chapter Two, section 2.3.1.4). The study component pertaining to the administration of the follow-up interviews had to be done remotely through phone calls and the WhatsApp platform. With this adjustment, the researcher can conclude that she appreciates the development of the qualitative research methodology perspectives, which were groundbreaking in the dissertation. It offered her the necessary skills to conduct smooth and systematic interviews (see Chapter One, section 1.7.3.5 and Chapter Two, sections 2.8-2.10) to engage the participants in knowledge around social workers' experiences, challenges, and solutions in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria.

One of the advantages noted was the researcher's ability to engage the respondents and the utilisation of active participatory tips and subsequently data analysis and interpretation to answer the main question and sub-questions. While these elements represented the study design and data processing methods, they also embodied the relational feature set to enhance cooperation with all the participants involved. Without an open space and an environment of trust, more resistance and possible interruptions could have been faced and therefore substantially hampered the researcher's efforts to achieve the overall objectives of the study. It then goes without saying that the qualitative nature of this research and the data verification strategies played a unique role in analysing and interpreting the data for the final research report. It enhanced the researcher's intellectual competency and horizons. She understood that the content therein should be worthwhile to read and also dependable in order to contribute to the existing knowledge in the broader field of the social work profession specialising in child protection to address the plight of children living on and off the streets without interventions.

#### **4.6.3 Recommendations relating to the qualitative research process**

With the above summary and conclusions, a recommendation was formulated using the research's own exploratory journey as a young scholar. She made efforts to build a case of social workers' experiences, challenges, and solutions in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets. Recognising the fieldwork information as generated, she believes this topic is a classic example of a contextual study using different qualitative approaches and methodology to achieve the expected outcomes. Stressing this contextual and phenomenological orientation (Tuffour 2017:2) and (Alase 2017:9), the following recommendation is made:

- The qualitative research methodology and its basic tenets oriented to semi-structured interviews and the questionnaire guide to construct quality evidence-based knowledge are characterised by the storylines. With this position, piloting, follow-up interviews, data processing through various exploratory methods, descriptions, coding, thematic analysis, and interpretations are put forward to lead a quality scholarly research output. It is therefore recommended that throughout the study, the researcher will always observe the values of data verification, conformability, and ethical standards.

- Another recommendation is that in preparation of data collection, the pilot study should be completed. The researcher should make sure that all questions have been tested and the interview guide has been compiled.

#### **4.7 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS IN RELATION TO THE FIELD RESEARCH FINDINGS AND LITERATURE CONTROL**

Conclusions and recommendations pertaining to the main findings on social workers' experiences, challenges, and solutions in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria, as developed in Chapter Three of the research are addressed in this section.

##### **4.7.1 Theme 1: Summary of social workers' experiences**

For the purpose of clarity, the language of social workers' experiences is all about those issues social workers witness or come across in their efforts to prevent the issue of children living on and off the streets, as has been reported in Chapter Three, section 3.3.1.

Study findings have confirmed that social worker participants carried out their responsibilities through family visits in which they engaged with parents and took the opportunity to develop a realistic picture of families at high risk of child maltreatment and more systemic issues that render a household dysfunctional. Family visits also help carry out family assessments, determining whether children in places of temporary care are ready to be reunited with their families to mitigate their recurrence on the streets. However, it was concerning to record poverty, unemployment, alcohol and drug abuse, pandemics, child-headed households, and orphans at the base of pull and push factors. Other concerns the participants listed out in the interviews were child maltreatment and neglect, together with a lack of regular income to support children. Social workers' experiences have therefore been characterised in the study paying attention to the extent of their knowledge about family circumstances and factors behind children living on and off the streets.

Moving from the sub-theme of social workers' experiences with children in the family environment, the next sub-theme was a summary of the findings on social workers'

experiences connected to children in the street environment. It was noted that the CYCC social workers do directly work with vulnerable children living on the streets. This initiative is beyond their involvement in the residential care operations. They want to be well informed of the children's real life on and off the streets and their places of abode. The interviews that the researcher conducted with the social worker participants concerning the children's lives on and off the streets made her aware that CYCC social workers do not have the power to place children in a place of safety. This concern was raised after social workers and social auxiliary workers revealed that placement is a long process handled by designated social workers who are not well informed on the situation on the ground. The researcher was also astonished that social workers do not have the power to readmit children absconding from residential care facilities. Amid these observations of power protocols and complications in placement, it was recorded that some children living on and off the streets are there after being abandoned by their biological mothers. They live without supervision and are physically and sexually abused. They live by scavenging from rubbish bins and are hungry. They sleep in unsafe and odd places exposed to criminals. Others were born on the streets and do not know any other life besides the streets. Drawing on the participants' perceptions, it was also recorded that social workers working with these children are building relationships of trust with them. They provide material support in the form of food and clothes. They talk to them, listen to them and, where possible, provide educational materials, including ballpoint pens and books so that they can learn to read and write. It was furthermore noted that these children are willing to leave the streets through a proper approach based on daily interactions with well-trained caregivers.

Along with the reported social workers' experiences in the family and street environments, this sub-theme is a summary of the experiences in the CYCCs' residential temporary care facilities. The findings revealed that social worker participants have a lack of statutory power to have a say in the children's intake, which is mainly handled by designated social workers who were criticised for lacking a commitment to the process. The DSD was also criticised for not intervening to help CYCC social workers facing a high volume of cases.



Beyond these remarks, the researcher wishes to summarise social workers' experiences in the CYCCs by stating the following:

- Children living on and off the streets are duly placed in CYCCs by designated social workers from the DSD and other licensed welfare organisations, like CMR, SAVF, and Rata Social Services (Pretoria), or by the police. The background reports about the circumstances of children living on and off the streets are also handed over to the CYCC social workers.
- CYCC social workers ensure that a child is integrated while attending different programmes as planned for each new child. Within three months, the CYCC social worker will write a report of children's circumstances in the CYCCs to be handed to designated social workers for court proceeding purposes.
- CYCC social workers are involved in addressing the basic needs of children, inter alia placement in different programmes such as sports and recreation, placement in schools, educational support after school, home affairs paper applications, family reunification and integration, and healthcare.
- Children living on and off the streets display frustrations, as they believe that no one can understand their situations. They fight with other children in the house, they do not respond well to discipline, and they develop defensive mechanisms, which becomes a challenge for social workers to manage their behaviours.
- CYCC social workers have no power to influence the magistrate's decision in the Children's Court using their knowledge and experience to promote the children's best interest. They feel sidelined by the DSD, which takes away their authority over children's situations and offers them a salary that is far less than the salary of designated social workers, while the latter's performance of their responsibilities towards children is questionable.

The study also explored social workers' experiences regarding children moving out of the CYCCs' temporary care. The participants appreciated that the CYCCs have been offering a safe place for children who live on and off the streets while also addressing other basic needs. However, since this intervention is in its nature about temporary support, it was concerning that children who move out at 18 years old are not supported toward their independent living. Some of the problems usually faced

are associated with housing, employment opportunities, education and training, community integration, and networking with community resources, among other opportunities required to advance themselves. It is at this stage that the participants expressed their dissatisfaction with the CYCCs' care services, since there is no continuity to ensure that all children/youth passing through their doors do not go back to a recurring life on the streets.

The study also captured social workers' experiences and perceptions regarding children's exit through abscondment, thereby exposing themselves to a recurring life on the streets. Factors behind children running away from care facilities are diverse and complex, because storylines indicated some of them go straight back to the streets. The researcher believes more studies need to be conducted in this area to get into the heart of CYCCs and abscondment to face the cycle of a recurring life on the streets. In view of these observations, social workers and social auxiliary workers concluded with the following insights, which became the researcher's key learning experiences:

- Children living on and off the streets have been exposed to sexual abuse from an early age; they become sexually active and it is difficult to manage their behaviours once they are brought into CYCC residential care, hence abscondment.
- Children living on and off the streets have been highly exposed to the influence of substance abuse, which has become a major cause for behaviours that are difficult to manage while in temporary care facilities. Although there are more attractions, easy access to drugs is one of the reasons behind abscondment, along with wanting to reconnect with former friends on the streets.
- CYCCs' care services are important, but are not seen as a long-lasting solution or a bridge toward independent living to end the recurrence of children living on and off the streets.

#### **4.7.2 Theme 2: Summary of social workers' challenges**

The second main theme generated from the research findings addresses the participants' views on challenges faced by social workers in rendering prevention

care services to children living on and off the streets. The storylines have been an invaluable tool to process the challenges and implications they have in rendering prevention care services:

- Referring to the environment of families, social workers and social auxiliary workers have indicated that parents are not investing effort into nurturing their children to prevent them from choosing to live on and off the streets. It was also noted that parents who are uncommitted to providing for their children's needs signals the community's indifference when it comes to a call for joint parental responsibility, involving parents/caretakers, social workers, and the government, to protect children.
- Some of the key challenges assessed in the family environment include parents' inability to emancipate themselves from poverty. Findings reflect cases where the constant lack of income has led to risk taking and bad decisions made by sending children to the streets to find money. Social workers conducting family visits are working in this environment of child abuse. When they find impoverished parents involved in alcohol and drug abuse, it becomes difficult to give their full attention to vulnerable children to prioritise safety and protection issues.
- Beyond the challenges in the family environment, findings on social workers and social auxiliary workers have indicated that working with vulnerable children requires efforts to help them apply for their identification documents. A lack of understanding of children's vulnerability by Home Affairs has been a major frustration for social workers who are committed to the rights of children living on and off the streets.
- Whereas in the findings it is stated that access to quality education for children living on and off the streets is required to rebuild their future, social workers and social auxiliary worker have revealed the struggles faced to secure school placements without fees. Government schools wishing to open doors for them are situated on the outskirts of town, far from the CYCCs, which becomes an

extra financial burden as children must be transported daily to attend classes. Schools in the heart of the city have been reluctant to receive these children, as they believe children from shelters are troublemakers with unruly behaviour developed from the streets. This report was taken seriously, as it is a characterisation of community stigma and prejudices levied against the most disadvantaged children in society.

- The participants revealed the challenge of the heavy workload social workers wrestle with, including handling cases and dealing with other administrative responsibilities within the CYCCs' operations. According to the findings, the extent of the problem is high, because in some instances social workers must take care of 50 or 60 children's cases which, as revealed, is far beyond the normal casework management ratio of 30 per social worker. A feeling of overload and helplessness to deliver more on the professional mandate of psychosocial support, therapeutic activities, and counselling has been a source of frustrations and burnout in the absence of a space offered to them for debriefing.
- The challenge of underfunding of the CYCCs' programmes by the DSD has come to the fore. As has been deeply debated, it was mentioned that inadequate funding has far-reaching consequences. The participants have complained that social workers do not have enough means to develop and implement interventions in their efforts to reach out to families that have a high risk of child maltreatment. Street outreach activities to connect with children and a shortage of caregivers and social workers were additionally listed among several other challenges, because not enough funding is allocated toward long-term prevention care services. It was pointed out that because of the persistent underfunding of CYCCs, demotivated social workers who feel that they are being underpaid work while looking for "greener pastures" matching their professional skills and experience.
- The last challenge that needs to be mentioned is of a legislative nature and has implications for social workers who are working to prevent the recurrence of

children living on and off the streets. CYCC social workers do not have statutory power, which is a setback to fast tracking services to children who live on the streets and come from high-risk families, as they are not duly authorised to institute removal and placement for safety and protection. Social workers further indicated the legislation does not make provisions for CYCC transitional services to children over 18 years old to enable the successful implementation of independent living programmes well aligned and wholistically integrated to end recurrence on the streets. A lack of a policy guidelines and resource allocations have been identified as structural problems hampering efforts to stop the recurrence of children living on and off the streets.

#### **4.7.3 Theme 3: Summary of social workers' solutions**

Pondering on the social workers' challenges, the participants suggested some solutions which can be summarised to keep in mind the main arguments of the last chapter. The proposed solutions given were not just meant to demonstrate that the study participants were raising critical issues arising from social workers' responsibilities, but the researcher learnt that they were also reflecting on solutions to move forward in delivering improved services to prevent the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria. This vital discussion has revolved around ideas with specific key targets, as presented in this sub-section.

Social workers and social auxiliary workers have shared that families at high risk of child maltreatment must receive priority in the delivery of prevention care services. Families have become central because of pull and push factors behind children running off to the streets. This understanding means that there is a need for social workers to continue visiting any family identified as being at high risk of child maltreatment. They will get all the support required to conduct a family assessment to determine whether the criteria are met to engage the relevant agencies in safeguarding children that are facing harm and who are at risk of fleeing their homes. The DSD and SACSSP have a mandate to ensure social workers are well supported and their work environment is favourable for them to discharge their responsibilities without any hindrances, as indicated earlier in Chapter Three, section 3.3.3.

Another suggested solution to improve the delivery of prevention care services is to find out ways to address the safety of children who are sleeping on the streets, because the environment there is unfavourable and security is risky. It was reported that they are exposed daily to drugs, violence, child trafficking, prostitution, substance addictions, unhygienic conditions, sexual abuse, and exploitation, among other vices. In view of the implications of all these issues in their lives, compounded by sleeping on the street, it was proposed that social workers and other agencies committed to child protection should work together to address the needs of children living on and off the streets. It was mentioned that well equipped drop-in centres with adequate resources can be used to connect with children on the streets. More of these ideas are discussed in Chapter Three, section 3.3.3. The idea behind these centres is that services such as a place to shower and change clothes; the provision of coffee and tea, food, medical support, condoms, counselling, sports, and entertainment; and access to spiritual upliftment, among others, can be piloted to established relationships with children on and off the streets. It was however cautioned that drop-in centre solutions can only bear fruit if they are going to be established in hotspots that are easily accessible to children who live on and off the streets and if they run 24/7 care services.

Again, in terms of the solutions to improve prevention care services to children living on and off the streets, social worker participants suggested that it would be better if they could be given the statutory power of removal and placement, as covered in Chapter Three, section 3.3.3. The reason being that they are better informed of children's harsh circumstances, since they work with them daily. They believe that the current DSD's protocol and procedures are rigid and complicate the placement process, while uninformed designated social workers are tasked to take final decisions in the matter.

Moreover, the participants felt that the current intake process of children living on and off the streets in CYCCs is not handled smoothly, which creates serious problems when it comes to capturing children's records in the filing system, family reunification, regular visits, and supervision by designated social workers. A solution is that CYCC social workers must work with the designated social workers to handle the intake jointly. The DSD and SASSCP can then keep on monitoring and supervising, as well

as instituting quality assurance control. The new system in place will ensure that the underlying issues of heavy caseloads, lack of staff debriefing, and gaps in salaries are addressed to the social workers' satisfaction (see Chapter Three, section 3.3.3).

The participants' proposed solutions further include a need to deliver quality prevention care services to children exiting from CYCCs because they have turned 18 years old. It was established that the current practices within the CYCCs are temporary and crisis-driven. Social workers and social auxiliary workers have stated that there is no balance between the short-term services and long-term prevention programmes to end the recurrence of children living on and off the streets. A proposed solution was multifaceted to advocate for the ideals of independent living through supporting children to access second-phase housing as part of CYCCs' extended support programmes toward independent living. There will be training and skills development to boost the capacity of children living on and off the streets to enter the job market. There will also be mentorship: *"Since they have been receiving everything for free while in the shelters, there is a need to mentor them, because you find they need proper advice and counselling in many areas as they approach a new life they were not used to"* (SAWG) (see Chapter Three, section 3.6.4.1).

Above all, it was mentioned that an independent living plan should be implemented, cherishing full community integration that would not be achieved without the government's initiatives to support families to become resilient in the fight against children living on and off the streets. This plan can be done in various ways: social workers and social auxiliary workers have suggested that the DSD system continue supporting children who are in CYCCs beyond 18 years of age because, according to their experiences, many children are still dependent on the CYCC's support when they turn 18 years old. The social workers also suggested that the DSD system should help children who are exiting the CYCCs, ensuring that they are adequately prepared to start a new life on their own. More details have been provided under the social workers' solutions in Chapter Three, section 3.3.3.

#### **4.8 CONCLUSIONS BASED ON THE RESEARCH FINDINGS**

Researching social workers' experiences, challenges, and solutions in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets was an exploratory and reflective exercise aiming at developing more knowledge about this important theme. Approaching the end of the study project, it is vitally important to keep in mind that the highlights represent the overall research objectives.

The research was conducted within the CYCCs of Tshwane, Pretoria, Gauteng Province. Interviews were held engaging with social workers and social auxiliary workers to get their perceptions on social workers' experiences, challenges, and solutions to respond to the recurrence of children living on and off the streets. Findings (see Chapter Three, sections 3.3.1 and 3.3.2) have shown that through dedicated family visitation to engage with parents and children, social workers and social auxiliary workers have indicated their awareness of the families at high risk of child maltreatment. Examples of a lack of joint parental responsibilities between social workers and parents to find common ground to stop children from running away from home and living on and off the streets were recorded for further investigation (see Chapter Three, section 3.3.2). This understanding was developed and analysed in the perspective of the pull and push factors behind the recurrence of children living on and off the streets. Being aware that families are the main cause of children living on and off the streets, the participants suggested that the CYCCs must invest in working closely with families and help meet the identified needs, including eradication of child maltreatment. Referring to Chapter One, section 1.2.2, prevention services should be upscaled through improving the implementation of prevention programmes. With this understanding, it is believed that many children living on and off the streets will drastically reduce and costs to take care of them in the temporary care will also come down. It is expected that social workers will be supported to discharge their responsibilities successfully by applying professional knowledge and skills to deliver effective prevention support care services, including family counselling and parental skills, among other psychosocial interventions aligned to child wellbeing and family welfare.

Bringing the study to its conclusion also, the findings linked children living on and off the streets to the street environment where they sleep. The issues of safety and protection together with the type of services children need in their places of abode



were developed. Social workers and social auxiliary workers' solutions were explored. The support they need was analysed to create a good understanding of how they can make progress in delivering prevention care services to children living on and off the streets.

The findings on children living on and off the streets that are hosted in the CYCCs made the researcher pay attention to the social workers' and social auxiliary workers' knowledge of intake protocols and how the process affects them in the line of duty. A question not answered was why there has not been a commitment from the DSD and SASSCP to create an enabling environment for CYCC social workers to perform their responsibilities of delivering prevention care services to children living on and off the streets effectively. As a result, working relationships between designated social workers and the CYCC social workers have been stained by a lack of collaboration in delivering improved prevention care services. A space to discuss the nature of their frustrations and be heard is limited and yet, as noted from the findings, they have been at the forefront in responding to the complex needs of children living on and off the streets (see Chapter Three, section 3.3.3).

Lastly, the participants demonstrated their commitment and passion to promoting the independent living programmes for children living on and off the streets who are exiting from the CYCCs because they have turned 18. Their understanding was that extended support services must be initiated as an integral component of the existing CYCCs' mandate to curb the cycle of children living on and off the streets. It will however be an oversight if these programmes are going to be implemented without a proper structure in place and policy guidelines, which was proposed as part of the solutions to independent living beyond residential temporary care services. It was also reiterated that the policy proposal will not be used as a manipulating tool by law enforcement to persuade children to make use of services that they see will not help them develop and thrive.

#### **4.9 RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON THE RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The final point of the concluding chapter presents the researcher's key recommendations thought through for future change considerations in respect of the

theme of the study project. These recommendations are formulated spotting the areas regarded to be the primary focus for CYCC social workers to better render improved prevention care services to children living on and off the streets.

#### **4.9.1 Recommendations for family services**

Because of the findings regarding families at high risk of child maltreatment and lack of early interventions, the researcher recommends that the CYCCs work toward finding a balance between crisis-driven care and preventative solutions for children living on and off the streets. The prevention juncture is an expression of a commitment to delivering more integrated and holistic responses, because the causes of children living on and off the streets are also multifaceted. To implement this recommendation, the following suggestions are made:

- CYCCs cannot work in isolation, as they will encounter limitations and will lose support from their close associates to enhance their capacity of fast-tracking prevention service delivery. It is recommended that CYCCs work with different local and international stakeholders, to avoid encountering limitations and to enhance their capacity of fast-tracking prevention services. The researcher noticed that all the CYCCs who contributed to her study belong to NGOs and some of them have international volunteers. Doorsamy, (2019:31-39) explores some of the tangible benefits CYCCs can enjoy by using volunteer recruiting model to enhance their operations while also boosting capacities of social workers. One of these benefits is sharing knowledge and experiences as some of the volunteers are highly skilled and since also some of them may be students or professionals from different fields. The author also believes that free services these volunteers can render especially to those underfunded CYCCs will reduce their operational costs to enable implementation of preprogrammes intended to prevent recurring of children on and off the streets.
- Based on the aforementioned **volunteer model** that Doorsamy presents, the researcher is recommending that each family identified to be at high risk of child neglect or maltreatment be allocated a social worker in a team of community support workers, all of whom will be working under constant supervision.

- Furthermore, based on the Doorsamy's **volunteer model**, the researcher is recommending that CYCCs find alternative innovative ways of raising funds, including using local and international volunteers which will help them allocate adequate practical resources into family work.
- Each family identified to be at high risk should be allocated a social worker in a team of community support workers, all of whom will be working under constant supervision. This is important in a family with high risks of child maltreatment where a child may be believed to be at risk and that issues of sexual violence and other related life-degrading issues may be involved. The idea of a dedicated social worker comes from the reviewed model of (McCoy and Keen 2022:223) to monitor the situation so that further steps can be taken including removal for placement to a place of safety without any delay.
- Adequate practical resources should be channelled to address the identified specific pull and push factors behind children living on and off the streets. In terms of the perused microsystem theory dealing with immediate home environment, and the pyramid of structured integrated services focusing on education of parents, informal and formal support services and as well as advocacy (McCoy and Keen 2022:222-223) this recommendation is put forward in the perspective of multi-disciplinary care support. The Children's Act cannot be regarded as one-size-fits-all because findings have shown that pull and push factors for children living on and off streets are complex and systemic. The researcher sees how the interdepartmental collaboration is critical and essential. For instance, the Department of Human Settlements can address family housing related challenges, Department of Health can directly deal with health involved issues, Department of Education to address education, Department of Small Business Development for empowerment, while Department of Justice can fundamentally monitor implementation of children's rights.

#### **4.9.2 Recommendations for street services**

A great demand was identified for the safety and protection of children living in the street environment which has offered them an alternative place to stay. Complex

issues involved were factored in recognising that the field is broad and critical, yet appears in the recent literature as an uncontested territory. This recommendation may be implemented for future change by deepening the following insights to cut across the cycle of children living on and off the streets:

- It is recommended that creating and strengthening drop-in centres in areas where many children live on and off the streets be made a priority to enable these children to receive services regularly. This recommendation is also motivated through some experts advocating that drop-in centres are an example of an intervention striving to fulfil positive youth development in various ways through providing “a physical space for young people to access services to meet a variety of needs, including basic needs” (Rice, Thompson, Cooper, Onasch-Vera, DiBattiste, Petry, McAlpin, & Petering, 2023:2). The researcher realises that this proposal is also consistent with Chapter 15 (92) of the Children’s Act (38) of 2005 (Social Development Department 2023:407).
- It is recommended that social workers who work with children living on and off the streets start by creating a relationship of trust between themselves and the children. This will make children feel free and loved, enabling them to develop trust and friendship and leading to open conversation and healing. This recommendation is support through Children’s Act 38 of 2005. Part III (d) which promote qualified social workers to work with children. Assessment of children who have been abused or deliberately neglected must be conducted by service providers who have appropriated knowledge of the indicators of abuse or neglect and an understanding of multi-disciplinary approach (Social Development Department 2023:601).
- It is recommended that social workers who work with children living in the street environment be given statutory power to remove the child from the street and place them in an alternative care centre. This is very important and helpful for both the child and social worker who are in the journey together. The research saw that, this issue needed to be part of the recommendation of being so much touched by SWE saying “*There are two different things that need to be solved*

*for the work of social workers and children. One, we need to be given the authority to remove the children from streets to children centres [CYCCs].”* This is not about forcing a child to leave the street unduly but to fast-track services while addressing crisis.

- It is recommended that CYCCs invest more efforts in awareness drives and roadshows intended to win public support and recruitment campaigns targeting local and internal volunteers with diverse professional knowledge and expertise supplemented with a passion to invest in the delivery of quality prevention care services. Some of the expertise to build on may include children’s rights activists, medical health specialists, psychologists, primary healthcare providers, community development experts, mental healthcare professionals, children’s advocates, professional counsellors, early child development experts, and dieticians. However, since it was reported that CYCCs are underfunded this recommendation may sound unrealistic to implement a plan of multi-disciplinary team. To move forward, Gamede (2020:89) proposes that DSD and CYCC should put in place in-service training workshops to train social workers on how to design, implement and evaluate programmes. Part of this plan should also be to encourage CYCCs social workers to have their own individual professional development plan to enhance their knowledge and skills in line with SACSSP policy.

#### **4.9.3 Recommendations for the CYCCs’ internal operations**

The importance of role of the CYCCs in providing solutions purported to uplift children living on and off the streets through the transitional care service model cannot be argued enough. Identified challenges though are linked to poor coordination and lack of social work service monitoring and supervision by the relevant bodies, notably the DSD and SACSSP being the custodians of the quality assurance framework and structures. To address this challenge, the following recommendations are made:

- Structured ongoing meetings bringing CYCC social workers and designated social workers face-to-face should start taking place so that they can discuss and agree on the areas of improvement in the intake of children living on and

off the streets. During research it was recorded that there is a gap from the children's intake mostly owing to procedural process not being properly followed. The scope of this recommendation takes into considerations Dimbani-Ndaleneni, Motloung & Kasiram (2022:67) proposing that "role overload and overlap could be addressed if DSD and CYCCs jointly engage to review policies (macro influence) to improve collaboration and teaming..." work. The team work and collaborations between CYCCs' social workers and their designated social worker counterparts should be formalised for better monitoring and supervision by both DSD and CYCC management.

- Since accountability is a key among all the parties involved, including the police, a high level of monitoring and supervision should be observed. The gaps deemed to be complex in the intake process should be collaboratively addressed in respect of the collectively agreed upon procedures. Moalosi (2019:107) suggests "better coordination" implying that a working relationship between CYCCs and DSD should be improved to implement standard operating procedures that should be monitored time to time.
- To boost a collaborative working relationship, the CYCC forum must not take a back seat amid the need for a database embodying prevention care support services and information, including statistics of children living on and off the streets around Tshwane. The researcher believes the database can serve as a powerful point of reference to guide and advise future researchers on the issues of children living on and off the streets. Given the ambit of Section 212 of the Children's Amendment Act 41 of 2007, key responsibilities for social workers are outlined including: assessing the children concerned to determine a care strategy, drawing up individual developmental plans (IDPs) for each child, ensuring that staff working with children implement the IDPs, ensuring that the therapy children receive aligns with the care plan, ensuring that case conferences occur with other professionals involved in a child's case and others (Phaswana & Erlank 2023:44). This recommendation is not only about CYCCs forum in Tshwane to be source of information for research purposes but also to create a space for CYCCs to come together to share experiences and

knowledge as part of ongoing reflection on models of good practices aligned with the prevention of children living on and off streets.

- Social work responsibilities should be separated from administrative and other operational matters and staff members should be appointed accordingly. This will reduce the workload of social workers, contribute to a healthy work environment, create adequate time for social workers to render prevention care services to children living on and off the streets, and prevent frustrations from entrenching. This recommendation is critical to improve services for children since social workers will dedicate more time on their core responsibilities and mandate. It is at this point Dimba-Ndalen, Motloug & Kasiram (2022:65) see a big need to employ additional CYCC social workers. This is also in line with the Children's Act 38 of 2005 which expects CYCCs according to clause (b) a sufficient number of staff or other appropriate persons to assist in operating the centre" (Social Development Department 2023:202).

#### **4.9.4 Recommendations pertaining to children exiting from CYCCs**

The researcher has concluded from the findings and literature review that the major issue in exiting overage children from CYCCs is that it is done in a way that seems as if the CYCC is just getting rid of children who have turned 18 years old. "There is a sudden dawning that she or he must leave and that something must be done..." (SAWH). Such an attitude is a setback and should stop because it weakens social workers with a passion to work with children living on and off the streets. A recommendation is that since the CYCCs' main mandate embodies transitional services as part of the compliance to manage these establishments, there is therefore a need to start rolling out independent living programmes. The recommendation reflects different applications coming together to promote the safe exit of children from the CYCCs as follows:

- The forum of the CYCCs in the City of Tshwane is a voice for children living on and off the streets, which implies that all its members are to be sensitised to implement independent living for the safe exit of each child. The forum should also ensure that none of its members will allow a child living on and off the

streets to exit without support mechanisms to get alternative safe housing. This suggests that in terms of Section 158 of Children's Act (38) 2005 which monitors "(b) permanency plan for the child" (Social Development Department (2023:164) should be interpreted in the context for CYCCs to refrain from forcing children out of residential care without due processes of safety measures being followed.

- In a CYCC that is a residence for children from the streets, where they have been recipients of temporary care services, exiting children without independent living programmes will set these children up for a recurring life on the streets. Available options to be incorporated into independent living plans may include longer-term housing support, education and life skills development, employment support, and career guidance, counselling, and mentorship to help children living on and off the streets regain confidence. Mendes (2019:1) warns "these initiatives have attracted limited resources, and mostly assisted the preparation of young people aged 15-17 years to leave care, rather than offering post-care support until at least 21 years." It is therefore suggested that CYCCs to make an independent plan realistically a success, they should consider working towards attracting private partners to support the project of children living on off streets without full reliance on government grants.
- CYCCs are to investigate the triggering forces behind the abscondment of children living on and off the streets and invest more capacity to stop the problem, because leaving this whole issue unaddressed will result in the cycle of children living on and off the streets continuing on unabated. Children's Act 38 of 2005 empowers "(1) Any police official or designated social worker may apprehend a child in alternative care who has absconded from youth care centre..." (Social Development Department 2023:171). The researcher suggests that this intervention is confusing and may lead to another way of abusing a child living on and off street, hence she suggests that more efforts and resources should be invested to eradicate root causes of abscondments.

#### **4.9.5 Recommendations for the Department of Social Development**



Given insights on the issues pertaining to the need of smooth and improved services rendered by CYCCs' social workers to children living on and off streets, reference is made to one of the latest findings by (Gumbi, Mazibuko and Sithole 2024:197). It was found that, social work as a profession exposes social workers to different contexts and challenges while engaging diverse clients. It was further noted that social work professional supervision is fundamental in social work professional practice. The researcher supports this view which makes her formulate the following recommendations for the DSD's oversight, because they are the official body responsible for CYCCs' compliance and registration in terms of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 update April 2023 (Social Development Department 2023:201).

The following suggestions are put forward:

- CYCCs should be capacitated to develop and implement effective transitional programmes as a continuation of journeying with children living on and off the streets to achieve full independent living through various ways. The implementation of the identified programmes should be monitored, and social workers involved should receive proper supervision to render quality professionalised services in a supportive environment. Section 126 of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 mandates DSD to ensure people working with or have access to children in institutions providing welfare service to children comply with the regulation and standard procedures (Social Development Department 2023:125). This is where the researcher thinks DSD should work close and continuously with CYCCs to monitor all social workers including designated social workers and a high level of accountability should be constantly checked to scale up performance.
- Monitoring the implementation plan of transitional care support services requires that the DSD come up with policy guidelines orientated to the specific needs and circumstances of children exiting from the CYCCs. The policy document can explore the possibility of extending the grant for children living on and off the streets to find their footing in a new life after their dependence on temporary residential care. This suggestion is not a new practice in the industry

of child and welfare system. At the global level, the researcher noted that countries like Australia that already has the policy, practitioners and researchers have started to lobby for a change challenging “the consistent emphasis of government policy on an inflexible age-related milestone and associated preparation for independence prior to 18 years of age, rather than continuing care until 21 years or beyond” (Mendes 2019:3).

- The DSD can also explore practical ways through which families can receive incentives, enabling them to become resilient and participate in stopping the cycle of children living on and off the streets through family reunification and community integration programmes. The implementation of this recommendation is intended to boost a working relationship and cooperation between the parents, DSD, CYCCs’ social workers and children. The implementation is therefore motivated in an understanding that: “although the CSG [child social grant] is of vital importance for children and their families, it cannot be expected that child poverty could ever be eliminated if the needs of the wider family in which they live are not taken into account” (Wright, Neves, Ntshongwana and Noble 2015:453).
- One of the weaknesses identified from the CYCCs is that they run a service which lacks standards to pursue independent living in a realistic sense to mitigate the risks of children living on and off the streets. Since the DSD is the custodian of quality assurance control with the authority to issue an NPO status to the CYCCs and operational framework, the researcher believes a transitional service policy guideline is required to advise on types of sustainable independent living services that can be implemented with ongoing funding. This falls under (104) Strategy concerning child protection in Child Act 38 of 2005 update April 2023. The law empowers the MEC for Social Development Department, “...must by money appropriated by the relevant provincial legislature, provide and fund designated child protection services ...(a) must be managed and maintained in accordance with this Act...” (Social Development Department 2023:108).

#### **4.9.6 Recommendations for future research considerations**

Throughout this research project many interesting themes emerged that helped the development of the thesis. However, because of time constraints and in order to keep the study focused on its overall objectives, the leftovers were kept in mind for recommendations as a base for future research interests on further perspectives about social workers' experiences, challenges, and solutions regarding children living on and off the streets:

- One of the biggest worries expressed by the participants was the children living on and off the streets exit from the temporary residential care without independent living programmes to work toward ending the cycle of a recurring life on the streets. It is therefore recommended that phenomenological investigations should be commissioned in this field by the government in collaboration with CYCCs to prepare the children to exit from the CYCCs' temporary care. The final report would become a useful tool in crafting a well-informed independent living programme. This recommendation is formulated based on another research which was done but in different area of children aging out of foster care. Research suggested that, "Independent Living Programme is which can be defined as a set of social skills designed to prepare the young person in advance for adult life where they are taught interpersonal skills aimed at helping them to interact with the world around them and to create structure in their lives" (Shaw 2019:xv).
- In the course of the study, it was found that among the children living on and off the streets are those who are not well mentally, and those who are physically and psychologically disabled. All these categories require specialised multidisciplinary solutions. Future research can be directed by interviewing social workers and the children living on and off the streets affected by the problem to record their perceptions on which types of special interventions are needed and which resources are required to achieve independent living. The relevance of this recommendation is based on a conceptual framework for prevalences of mental health problems among street children in India (Savarkar and Das 2019:41) which advocates for future interventions focusing on policy

to monitor implementation of holistic service approaches. The researcher therefore believes this recommendation is aligned with the ecosystem of the CYCCs to prioritise special services for children living on and off streets and who are identified to have mental health problems.

- It is unclear why the CYCC social workers that directly engage with children living on and off the streets to cover families, streets, and CYCCs are treated differently from their DSD counterparts, since they are all accountable to one governing body (SACSSP) and deal with a particular societal issue. The key identified issues were a lack of statutory power, poor employment wellness support and supervision, and remuneration discrepancies, which weaken the sustainability and continuity of the industry. Gray and Lombard (2022:438) acknowledge the direction of the researcher's concerns stating that "the difficulties involved in training CYCWs and providing workplaces that rewarded them accordingly, the rewards of professionalisation, had proved a major challenge...". The researcher believes that, this is where the important bodies such as the SACSSP should intervene and advocate for the needs of CYCCs social workers who work tirelessly to ensure that their services are improved while working with a more sense of rigor and motivation toward ending the cycle of children living on and off the streets.

#### **4.10 STUDY LIMITATIONS**

While processing the empirical findings on social workers' experiences, challenges, and solutions in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria, the researcher was surprised to learn how wide the field is. In fact, it is far wider than she expected before the project started to take shape. In analysing the facts, the DSD, SACSSP, parents, and children living on and off the streets are part of the main characters who are visible in this research. The researcher concludes that interviewing some of these stakeholders could have offered more perspectives on the topic and led to more recommendations and, therefore, she recorded this as her first study limitation. For instance, the identified issues, such as social workers' overload, lack of supervision for social workers, underfunding of CYCCs, and the lack of a transitional service policy in alignment with

the prevention of the recurrence of children living on and off the streets, could have been explored by interviewing officials from the DSD.

As mentioned, the researcher's original hope was to get to interview eight social workers in total from different CYCCs. Along the way, she learnt that plan could not work out as not all CYCCs had social workers, hence resorting to the inclusion of two social auxiliary workers, which is recorded as an additional limitation in this study.

Perhaps, if an opportunity arises in the future to pursue further studies in the same field, these limitations will be considered to delve further into the prevention of the recurrence of children living on and off the streets.

#### **4.11 CONCLUSION**

To conclude the chapter, the main highlights focused on the summaries representing the qualitative research methodology and findings on social workers' experiences, challenges, and solutions to children living on and off the streets, each having its own heading. Subsequently the chapter brought in the conclusions and key recommendations formulated under the ambit of the research objectives and main research question. In summarising the main study argument, the headings were subdivided into social workers' experiences, social workers' challenges, and social workers' solutions in the family, street, CYCC, and exit environments. Lastly, the chapter featured recommendations of specific issues for future research considerations. These issues were noted but not developed because of time constraints and since the researcher had already reached the stage of saturation.

The study therefore comes to a close, acknowledging the new knowledge and inspiring skills the researcher acquired being a social worker herself with a passion for the plight of children living on and off the streets. She is enthusiastic to apply the key learning experiences and lessons learnt at her workplace, hoping to be more productive while seeking an opportunity and space to open a new academic page for further research in the critically identified areas.

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## ADDENDUMS

### ADDENDUM 1



#### SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (SWREC)

Date: 17 April 2020

Dear Ms N.V. Ntakirutimana

**DECISION:**  
Ethics approval from 17 April 2020 to  
17  
April 2021

**SWREC Reference #: 2020-SWREC-  
47115246**  
**Name: Ms N.V. Ntakirutimana**  
**Student #: 47115246**  
**Staff #: N/A**

**Researcher(s):** Name: Ms N.V. Ntakirutimana  
Contact details: 47115246@mylife.unisa.ac.za

**Supervisor(s):** Name: Ms R.M. Skhosana  
Contact details: skhosrm@unisa.ac.za, +27 (0) 76 699 2359

#### **Title of research:**

Social Worker's Experiences, Challenges and Solutions to Prevent Recurring of Children Living on and off the Streets in Tshwane, Pretoria

**Qualification:** Master of Social Work (MSW)

---

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Social Work Research Ethics Committee (SWREC) for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval has been granted effective from **17 April 2020**.

The following are standards requirements attached to all approval of all studies:

1. Approval will be for a period of twelve months from of the date of issue of the certificate. At the end of this period, if the study has been completed, abandoned, discontinued or not completed for any reason you are required to submit a report on the project. If you complete the work earlier that you had planned, you must

submit a report as soon as the work is completed. Reporting template can be requested from the SWREC administrator on [radebn1@unisa.ac.za](mailto:radebn1@unisa.ac.za)

2. However, at the **end of twelve months' period** if the study is still current, you should instead submit an application for renewal of the approval.
3. Please remember that you must notify the committee in writing regarding any amendments to the study.
4. You must notify the committee immediately in the event of any adverse effects on participants or any unforeseen event that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the study.
5. At all times you are responsible for the ethical conduct of your research in accordance with the SWREC standard operating procedures, terms of references, National Health Research Council (NHREC) and university guidelines. Yours sincerely



.....

Dr KJ Malesa: Chairperson of SWREC

Email: [maleskj@unisa.ac.za](mailto:maleskj@unisa.ac.za)

Tel No.: (012) 429 4780

## ADDENDUM 2

### PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH LETTER

Date: 03 January 2020

Title: Mrs.

Dear Tshwane CYCC Forum Coordinator,

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

My name is Niyiguha Vestine Ntakirutimana and I am doing research with Dr Rebecca Mmamoagi Skhosana, a research fellow in the Department of Social Work, towards Master's Degree, at the University of South Africa. We are requesting permission from you to conduct a research study with social workers who are under the Tshwane CYCC Forum. The title of the research study is as follows:

**Social workers' experiences, challenges, and solutions in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria.**

Below I have also attached the participants' letter that explains in details all the requirements and other information that you might need to understand our request. For any further clarity, please don't hesitate to contact Vestine Ntakirutimana on 0829789020 or [vestinehafra@gmail.com](mailto:vestinehafra@gmail.com). Or [Vestine@tlf.org.za](mailto:Vestine@tlf.org.za).

Yours truly,

Mrs. Niyiguha Vestine Ntakirutimana  
UNISA Student



### **ADDENDUM 3**

#### **INVITATION AND INFORMATION LETTER FOR PARTICIPANTS TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY**

Date: 03 January 2020

Title: Mrs.

Dear Prospective Participant,

#### **RE: INVITATION AND INFORMATION LETTER FOR PARTICIPANTS TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY**

My name is Niyiguha Vestine Ntakirutimana and I am doing research with Dr Rebecca Mmamoagi Skhosana, a research fellow in the Department of Social Work, towards Master's Degree, at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled:

#### **Social workers' experiences, challenges and solutions to prevent recurring of children living on and off the streets in Tshwane, Pretoria**

#### **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?**

I am conducting this research to find out about the experiences of social workers in rendering prevention services to children living on and off the streets in Tshwane, Pretoria.

#### **WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?**

I have chosen you to participate since you meet the criteria of inclusion for the study and therefore possess information required to inform the study.

#### **WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?**

The study involves the use of a digital recorder. The questions to be asked are captured below. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes and you may be required to avail yourself for a follow-up interview.

Research interview questions are as follows:

- Tell me about your experience in rendering prevention services to children living on and off the streets?
- What types of social welfare services do you offer to children living on and off the streets?
- What are success stories that you can share with me that are result of the prevention services that you rendered to community?
- What are the challenges you meet when offering prevention services?

- What are the suggestions on how to enhance the prevention of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane?

### **CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?**

Participating in this study is purely voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. Should you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

### **WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**

The opportunity to share your experiences is a benefit on its own as that taking part in the study may help you to face and redefine your stances in relation to the topic under study. Furthermore, this study will contribute to the body of knowledge as it aims to highlight the processes of family construction followed by adult children raised in families with absent fathers.

### **ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?**

There are no negative consequences for participating in the research study. If a need should arise that a participant needs debriefing, the researcher will have a social worker who is always on standby to provide debriefing.

### **WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?**

Your name will not be recorded anywhere and no one will be able to connect you to the answers you give. Your answers will be given a code number or a pseudonym and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings.

Your answers may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including the transcriber, external coder, and members of the Research Ethics Review Committee. Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records.

Your anonymous data may be used for other purposes, such as a research report, journal articles and/or conference proceedings. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report.

### **HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?**

Hard copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for a minimum period of five years in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet in a locked office. For future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable.

## **WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?**

There will not be any payment or reward offered for your participation in the study. In addition, no cost will be incurred by participants to participate in the study.

## **HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL?**

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the Social Work department at Unisa. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

## **HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?**

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Niyiguha Vestine Ntakirutimana, telephone number 082 978 9020 or email address [vestine@tif.org.za](mailto:vestine@tif.org.za) The findings may be available in the next four years. Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact Rebecca at [skhosrm@unisa.ac.za](mailto:skhosrm@unisa.ac.za) .

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

## ADDENDUM 4

### INFORMED CONSENT

I, (full name) ....., herewith confirm that the person Full name) .....who is asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

Statement	Agree	Do not agree
I have read and understood the study as explained in the information sheet		
I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study		
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty		
I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified		
I agree to the recording to the face-to-face interview proceedings		
I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement		

Participant's name and Surname: .....

Participant Signature: .....Date.....

Researcher's Name & Surname: Niyiguha Vestine Ntakirutimana

Researcher's signature: .....Date.....

## **ADDENDUM 5**

### **Data collection instrument**

These following key questions will be used to compile the biographical data of the participants:

- Would you please indicate your date of birth?
- What is your age-group?
- What is your gender?
- What is race category between African, Indian, and White, Coloured or other?
- What are your highest academic qualifications?
- What is your employment status visa -a-vis social work grades?

The following is the interview guide for the interviews to ensure that all questions are clear and are aligning with the envisaged study objectives:

- Tell me about your experiences in rendering prevention services to the recurring of children living on and off the streets in tshwane, pretoria?
- What types of social welfare services do you offer to children living on and off the streets?
- What are success stories that you can share with me that are result of the prevention services that you rendered to the community? To families? To children?
- What are the challenges you meet when offering prevention services?
- What are the suggestions on how to enhance the prevention of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane?

## ADDENDUM 6

### REQUEST TO DO DEBRIEFING

Date: 03 January 2020

Title: Mrs.

Dear Tshwane CYCC Forum Coordinator,

RE: REQUEST TO DO DEBRIEFING

My name is Niyiguha Vestine Ntakirutimana and I am doing research with Ms Rebecca Mmamoagi Skhosana, a research fellow in the Department of Social Work, towards Master's Degree, at the University of South Africa. We are requesting you to conduct debriefing sessions with social worker participants who might need it during interview sessions. The title of the research study is as follows:

**Social workers' experiences, challenges, and solutions in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria.**

Please kindly feel free to contact me (Vestine Ntakirutimana) should you require any further explanation on my mobile number 082978020 or email address [vestine@tlf.org.za](mailto:vestine@tlf.org.za).

Kind regards,

Niyiguha Vestine Ntakirutimana (Mrs.)  
Student social worker

## ADDENDUM 7

### DEBRIEFER ACCEPTANCE LETTER

To Whom It May Concern

I....., Social work practice registration number ..... in my capacity as a professional social worker, hereby agree to render debriefing services to any participant who will need it during the time Mrs. Niyiguha Vestine Ntakirutimana will be conducting the interviews for her research entitled:

**Social workers' experiences, challenges and solutions to prevent recurring of children living on and off the streets in Tshwane,P.**

I have attached my CV for any other information you might need.

Kind regards

Mrs. ....

Social Worker

Cell No: 082 3869116

Email address: .....

Date: 05 Jan 2020

## ADDENDUM 8

### DEBRIEFER'S CV

**Name** : .....

**Gender** : Female

**Home Language** : Xitsonga

**Contact number** : .....

**Physical Address** : Box 258, Tram shed, 0126

**Driver's License** : Code 10 (C1)

**Educational Background**

**High School attended** : IONA Convent

**Highest Grade Passed** : Grade 12

**Tertiary institution**

**Institution** : University of South Africa

**Degree Obtained** : Bachelor of Social Work

**Other qualification:** Basic Computer Literacy, HIV/AIDS Counselling and testing  
Security

**Work experience:**

**HIV/AIDS Counsellor**

**Duties:** pre and post-test, on-going, adherence counselling and report writing.

**Agency:** Department of Health (Skinner Street Clinic)

**Duration:** 2 years

**Social worker:**

**Duties:** child protection, family services, group work, statutory, reintegration, rehabilitation, reunification and restoration, counselling, prevention and promotion, conducting awareness campaign and home visits, referrals to relevant stakeholders, supervising social workers in women's shelters.



**Agency:** Department of Social Development (Pretoria Central)

Duration: August 2008 to date

## ADDENDUM 9

### LETTER FROM LANGUAGE EDITOR

#### EDITOR'S STATEMENT

14 May 2024

I hereby declare that I have edited this dissertation entitled *Social Workers' Experiences, Challenges, And Solutions in Preventing the Recurrence of Children Living On and Off The Streets in the City Of Tshwane, Pretoria* by Vestine Ntakirutimana (student number 47115246). The edit entailed correcting spelling and grammar where necessary, and checking for consistencies in style and reference method used, according to guidelines provided by the student. I have not helped to write this document or altered the student's work in any significant way. I will not be held accountable for bad spelling or grammar or incorrect referencing where the student has rejected my editing, ignored my suggestions, or made changes after I had completed my edit.

It was not my responsibility to check for any instances of plagiarism and I will not be held accountable should the student commit plagiarism. I did not check the validity or factual accuracy of the student's statements/research/arguments. Lastly, I was not tasked to check, edit or add the student's addenda/annexures.

---

**Lindi De Beer**

**Contact Details:**

083 456 4358

[lindi@grammarsmith.co.za](mailto:lindi@grammarsmith.co.za)

## ADDENDUM 10

### PARTICIPANT'S INFORMATION SHEET

#### IMPORTANT MESSAGE TO PARTICIPANT/REPRESENTATIVE OF PARTICIPANT

Dear Participant/Representative of participant,

This letter serves to thank you for participating in the research study titled as follows:

**Social workers' experiences, challenges, and solutions in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria.**

This letter also is to inform you that, should at any time during the study an emergency arise as a result of the research, or even you require any further information with regard to the same study, kindly contact **Niyiguha Vestine Ntakirutimana**. Mobile number **0829789020** or email address [vestine@tlf.org.za](mailto:vestine@tlf.org.za) can be used for your convenience.

Kind Regards

Researcher: Mrs. Niyiguha Vestine Ntakirutimana  
Student number: 47115246

## ADDENDUM 11

### RISK ASSESSMENT

**Research title: Social workers’ experiences, challenges, and solutions in preventing the recurrence of children living on and off the streets in the City of Tshwane, Pretoria**

**Researcher: Niyiguha Vestine Ntakirutimana**

**Student number: 47115246**

### RISK ASSESSMENT

Complete the Research Ethics Risk Assessment by answering each question below. If you answer “**YES**” to any of the items, the outcome of the risk assessment is considered to vary from a low to high-risk level. The UNISA research ethics review system is based on the UNISA Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for Research Ethics Risk Assessment. If you are an external applicant, a copy of this document can be requested from [urerc@unisa.ac.za](mailto:urerc@unisa.ac.za); internal applicants can click on this [link](#) to obtain the document. If you are unsure about the meaning of any of these concepts, please consult your supervisor or project leader.

<b>1</b>	<b>Does your research include the direct involvement of any of the following groups of participants (Refer to Section 4 in the SOP)</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
<i>Place an ‘x’ in box [if yes, provide details in the space allocated for comments]</i>			
	a) Children or young people under the age of 18 Include the parental consent letter and explain how assent will be obtained in section 6.1 of the application form.		<b>X</b>
	b) Persons living with disabilities ( <i>physical, mental and/or sensory</i> ) <sup>4</sup>		<b>X</b>
	c) Persons that might be considered vulnerable, thus finding it difficult to make independent and/or informed decisions for socio, economic, cultural, political and/or medical reasons ( <i>such as the elderly, the dying, unconscious patients, prisoners, those in dependant relationships, women considered to be vulnerable due to pregnancy, victimisation, etc.</i> )		<b>X</b>
	d) Communities that might be considered vulnerable, thus finding it difficult to make independent and informed decisions for socio, economic, cultural, political and/or medical reasons		<b>X</b>
	e) UNISA employees, students or alumni Indicate that you will apply for permission at the UNISA Research Permission Subcommittee (RPCS) in section 3.1 of the application form to involve any of these participant groups in the proposed research.		<b>X</b>
	f) Persons whose native language differs from the language used for the research		<b>X</b>

<sup>4</sup> Describe whether and how proxy or gatekeeper consent will be obtained in section 6.1 relevant to items 2.1. a – e

Attach the translated data collection instrument(s), interview guide(s), participant information sheet and consent form in the participants' first language, as well as a letter from the language practitioner certifying the credibility of the translated material. The services of an interpreter may need to be secured for field work activities.			
g) There is a likelihood that a person or definable group will be identified during the research process and it is likely to be of concern.			<b>X</b>
h) Other <sup>5</sup> . Please describe.			
<b>Comments:</b> If you selected any option above, please describe it in detail here.			
<b>2</b>	<b>Does your research involve any of the following types of activity that could potentially place the participants at risk of harm?</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
<i>Place an 'x' in the box provided [if yes, provide details in the space allocated for comments]</i>			
a) Collection, use or disclosure of personal, identifiable information <u>without</u> the consent of the individual or institution that is in possession of the required information (with the exception of aggregated data or data from official databases in the public domain)			<b>X</b>
b) Collection, use or disclosure of personal, identifiable information directly from participants <u>with</u> consent			<b>X</b>
c) Personal, identifiable information to be collected about individuals from available records (e.g. employee records, student records, medical records, etc.) and/or archives			<b>X</b>
b) Participants being exposed to questions which may be experienced as stressful or upsetting, or to procedures which may have unpleasant or harmful side effects			<b>X</b>
e) Participants being required to commit an act which might diminish self-respect or cause them to experience shame, embarrassment, or regret			<b>X</b>
f) Any form of deception of participants, concealment or covert observation			<b>X</b>
d) Examining potentially sensitive or contentious issues that could cause harm to the participants			<b>X</b>
g) Research which may be prejudicial to participants			<b>X</b>
f) Research which may intrude on the rights of third parties or people not directly involved			<b>X</b>
f) Audio-visual recordings of participants which may be of a sensitive or compromising nature (with or without consent)			<b>X</b>
g) Disclosure of the findings of the research could place participants at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to their financial standing, employability, professional or personal relationships			<b>X</b>
h) Any form of physically invasive diagnostic, therapeutic or medical procedure such as blood collection, an exercise regime, body measurements or physical examination			<b>X</b>
k)*Psychological inventories / scales / tests			<b>0</b>
q) Other. Please describe			
<b>Comments:</b>			

<sup>5</sup> Form 1 does not apply to plant, molecular or cell research, animal and environmentally related research.

*\*Please add details on copyright issues related to standardised psychometric tests and registration at the HPSCA of test administrator if test administration is in South Africa or of an equivalent board if administration is non-South African.*

<b>3</b>	<b>Does your research involve any activity that could potentially place the researcher(s) at risk of harm?</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
	a) There is a possible risk of physical threat, abuse or psychological trauma as a result of actual or threatened violence or the nature of what is disclosed during the interaction		<b>X</b>
	b) There is a possible risk of being in a compromising situation, in which there might be accusations of improper behaviour		<b>X</b>
	c) There is an increased exposure to risks in everyday life and social interactions, such as working with hazardous materials or sensitive information		<b>X</b>
	<b>Comments:</b>		
<b>4</b>	<b>Does any of the following apply to your research project?</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
<i>Place an 'x' in the box provided [if yes, provide details in the space allocated for comments]</i>			
	a) Participants will be offered inducements or incentives to encourage their involvement in the research		<b>X</b>
	b) Participants will incur financial obligations as a result of their participation in the research		<b>X</b>
	c) The researcher(s) can anticipate financial gains from involvement in the research (i.e. contract research)		<b>X</b>
	d) Any other potential conflict of interests, real or perceived, that could be seen as compromising the researcher(s) professional judgement in carrying out or reporting on the research		<b>X</b>
	e) Research will make use of Unisa laboratories		<b>X</b>
	f) Research will be funded by UNISA or by an external funding body that could compromise the integrity of the research project		<b>X</b>
	<b>Comments:</b> If you selected any option above, please describe it in detail here.		
<b>5</b>	<b>Guided by the information above, classify your research project based on the anticipated degree of risk. [The researcher completes this section. The ERC critically evaluates this benefit-risk analysis to protect participants' rights]</b> <i>Place an 'x' in the box provided</i>		
<b>Category 1 Negligible</b> No to indirect human participant involvement. If you choose this option, stop completing this form and contact	<b>Category 2 Low risk</b> Direct human participant involvement. The only foreseeable risk of harm is the potential for minor discomfort or inconvenience, thus research that would not pose a	<b>Category 3 Medium risk</b> Direct human participant involvement. Research that poses a risk above the everyday norm, including physical, psychological and social risks. Steps	<b>X</b> <b>Category 4 High risk</b> Direct human participant involvement. A real or foreseeable risk of harm including physical, psychological and social risk which may lead to a

URERC@uni sa.ac.za		risk above the everyday norm.		can be taken to minimise the likelihood of the event occurring.	serious adverse event if not managed responsibly.	
<p>(a) Briefly justify your choice/classification</p> <p>This study presents a medium risk, as semi-structured interviews will be conducted with research participants- it might be/ but cannot be predicted that participants can be emotional regarding their experiences, memories or past.</p>						
<p>(b) In medium and high-risk research, <u>indicate the potential benefits</u> of the study for the research participants and/or other entities.</p> <p>The benefits are that research participants will receive an opportunity to voice their needs, experiences so that others in the correctional system can understand them better</p>						
<p>(c) In medium and high-risk research, <u>indicate how the potential risks of harm will be mitigated</u> by explaining the steps that will be taken to minimise the likelihood of the event occurring (e.g. referral for counselling, debriefing, etc.).</p> <p>Agreement was reached for debriefing sessions to be conducted by a social worker for corrections, who understands the setup and client system</p>						

## ADDENDUM 12





### CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT WITH RESEARCH THIRD PARTIES

Hereby, I, *Lindi de Beer*, in my capacity as *language editor*, am aware of and familiar with the stipulations and contents of the conditions of ethical clearance specific to this study of which the title is: *Social workers' experiences, challenges, and solutions to prevent the recurring of children living on and off the streets in Tshwane, Pretoria.*


I shall conform to and abide by these conditions. Furthermore, I am aware of the sensitivity of the information collected and the need for strict controls to ensure confidentiality obligations associated with the study.

I agree to the privacy and confidentiality of the information I am granted access to in my duties as *language editor*. I will not disclose or sell the information I have been granted permission to gain access to, in good faith, to anyone.

I also confirm that I have been briefed by the research team on the protocols and expectations of my behaviour and involvement in the research as a *language editor*.

Title	Signature	Date
Researcher Niyiguha Vestine Ntakirutimana		16/05/2024
Supervisor		20/05/2024



<b>Debriefer/ Transcriber/ Independent coder/ Data capturer/ Language editor</b>		20/05/2024
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