EXPLORING ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES (ACE) AND THEIR EFFECT ON MOTHERHOOD: PERCEPTIONS OF THE ADULT-CHILD

by

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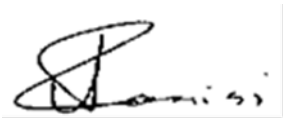
I declare that '*Exploring Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) and their Effect on Motherhood: Perceptions of the Adult-Child'* is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



14/10/2024

Signature Date

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my late friend who became a brother, Kelebogile Phenyo Moeje "KPKinHouse".

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Abstract

Exploring Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) and their Effect on Motherhood: Perception of the Adult-Child

Women's voices have been historically silenced in narratives of historical and collective trauma in South Africa. Women's voices have been even more silent on how the historical and systematic oppression in South Africa interacted with domestic experiences within Black African households during and post-apartheid. The literature suggests that earlier childhood experiences inform transitions to other life developmental stages, such as motherhood. Research from South Africa shows high rates of individual exposure to childhood adversity in African girls and boys, which affect their life outcomes. However, with regard to girls (girl children), minimal research has explored how Black African women's experiences of childhood traumas shape their transition to motherhood. This qualitative study explored how Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE), and contextual factors shape motherhood. Contextual factors in pre- and post-apartheid South Africa were highlighted concerning how they shape mothering practices and affect maternal mental health. Using a collective case study design, semi-structured interviews and reflective documents, data were collected from eight Black African women ranging in age from 30 to 45 years. The women experienced varied forms of adversities (physical abuse, neglect, maltreatment, violence) in the home during their childhood. A combination of purposive and snowball sampling was used to select the participants. The thematic analysis unpacked complex perspectives on mothering in the context of previous childhood adversities as well as mental health protective and risk factors. Through the lenses of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, the study provides a systems perspective of adverse childhood experiences and factors affecting motherhood in this context. Narratives of upbringing showed a nuanced interplay between stability and instability, particularly in the context of mobility and complex family structures. The findings

presented the complexities of father involvement and disengagement in the context of childhood adversities among a sample of Black South African women born between 1980 and 1990. It further provided valuable insights for comprehending the broader societal landscape and the evolving roles of fathers within African families. Guardianship family structures and kinship care unveiled a spectrum of experiences, emphasising the significant role of extended family members in shaping childhoods. The mothers' childhood experiences, as well as the perceptions of their own mothers, informed maternal identities and their ideologies of motherhood. The study recommends that childhood adversities should be considered during interventions addressing maternal mental health.

Keywords: *adverse childhood experiences (ACE), Bronfenbrenner, child maltreatment, collective motherhood, ecological systems theory, reflexive thematic analysis, trauma*

Abstrak

Ondersoek van ongunstige ervarings in kinderjare en die uitwerking daarvan op moederskap: persepsie van die volwasse kind

Vroue se stemme is histories stilgemaak in narratiewe van historiese en kollektiewe trauma in Suid-Afrika. Vrou se stemme is selfs stiller oor die wisselwerking tussen die historiese en sistematiese onderdrukking in Suid-Afrika en huishoudelike ervarings in swart huishoudings tydens en ná apartheid. Die literatuur dui daarop dat vroeë kinderervarings die oorgang na ander lewensontwikkelingstadia, soos moederskap, inlig. Navorsing uit Suid-Afrika toon hoë koerse van individuele blootstelling aan kinderteenspoed in Afrika-dogters en -seuns wat hulle lewensuitkomste beïnvloed. Wat meisies betref, het minimale navorsing egter ondersoek hoe swart Afrika-vroue se ervarings van kindertraumas hulle oorgang na moederskap vorm. Hierdie kwalitatiewe studie het ondersoek hoe nadelige kinder-ervarings en kontekstuele faktore moederskap vorm. Kontekstuele faktore in pre- en postapartheid-Suid-Afrika is beklemtoon ten opsigte van hoe hulle moederpraktyke vorm en moedergeestesgesondheid beïnvloed. Deur middel van ’n kollektiewe gevallestudie-ontwerp, semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude en reflektiewe dokumente is data ingesamel van agt swart Afrika-vroue tussen die ouderdom van 30 en 45 jaar. Die vroue het gedurende hulle kinderjare verskeie vorme van teenspoed (fisiese mishandeling, verwaarlosing, mishandeling en geweld) in die huis ervaar. ’n Kombinasie van doelgerigte en sneeubalsteekproefneming is gebruik om die deelnemers te selekteer. Die tematiese ontleding het komplekse perspektiewe oor moederskap in die kontekste van vorige kinderteenspoed asook beskermings- en risikofaktore vir geestelike gesondheid ondersoek. Deur die lens van Bronfenbrenner se ekologiese sisteemteorie verskaf die studie ’n sisteemperspektief van ongunstige kinderervarings en -faktore wat moederskap in hierdie konteks beïnvloed. Narratiewe van opvoeding het ’n genuanseerde wisselwerking tussen stabiliteit en onstabiliteit getoon, veral

in die konteks van mobiliteit en komplekse gesinstrukture. Die bevindinge het die kompleksiteite van vaderbetrokkenheid en -onbetrokkenheid in die konteks van kinderteenspoed onder Suid-Afrikaanse vroue gebore tussen 1980 en 1990 weergegee. Dit het verder waardevolle insigte verskaf om die breër samelewingslandskap en die ontwikkelende rolle van vaders in Afrika-gesinne te begryp. Voogdyskapgesinstrukture en verwantskapsorg het ’n spektrum van ervarings onthul wat die beduidende rol van lede van die uitgebreide familie in die vorming van kinderjare beklemtoon. Die moeders se kinderervarings asook die persepsies van hulle eie moeders het moeder-identiteite en hulle ideologieë van moederskap ingelig. Die studie beveel aan dat kinderteenspoed in ag geneem moet word tydens ingrypings wat moedergeestesgesondheid aanpak.

Sleutelwoorde: *ongunstige kinderervarings, Bronfenbrenner, kindermishandeling, kollektiewe moederskap, ekologiese sisteemteorie, refleksiewe tematiese analise, trauma*

Tshobokanyo

Go sekaseka Maitemogelo a a sa Siamang a Bongwana (di-ACE) le Ditlamorago tsa One mo Go nneng Mme: Kakanyo ya Mogolo-Ngwana

Mantswe a basadi a ntse a kganetswe go bua mo nakong e e fetileng mo ditlhalosong tsa kutlobotlhoko e e itemogetsweng ke batho ba morafe o o rileng mo Aforika Borwa. Mantswe a basadi a ne a didimaditswe le go feta ka ga tsela e kgatelelo ya mo nakong e e fetileng e e neng e tshegediwa ke puso ya nako eo mo Aforika Borwa e neng e golagana ka teng le maitemogelo a selegae mo malapeng a Bantsho ka nako ya tlhaolele le morago ga yone. Diphasalatso di tshitsinya gore maitemogelo a go sale gale a bongwana a kaela go fetogela mo dikgatong tse dingwe sa kgolo mo botshelong, tse di jaaka go nna mme. Tlhotlhomiso go tswa mo Aforika Borwa e bontsha dielo tse di kwa godimo tsa maitemogelo a motho ka nosi a bothata mo bongwaneng mo basetsaneng le basimane ba Bantsho, a a amang se ba nnang sone mo botshelong. Le fa go ntse jalo, malebana le basetsana (bana ba basetsana), tlhotlhomiso e potlana e sekasekile tsela e maitemogelo a basadi ba Bantsho a kutlobotlhoko e e itemogetsweng mo bongwaneng jwa bone e bopang ka teng go fetoga ga bone go nna bomme. Thutopatlisiso eno e e sa akaretseng dipalo e sekasekile mokgwa o Maitemogelo a a sa Siamang a Bongwana (di-ACE) le ditlhotlheletso tse di bakilweng ke maemo a a rileng di bopang ka teng go nna mme. Ditlhotlheletsi tse di bakilweng ke maemo a mo Aforika Borwa wa pele le morago ga tlhaolele di gateletswe malebana le tsela e di bopang mekgwatiriso ya ga mme ya go godisa bana le go ama pholo ya moganano wa ga mme. Ka tiriso ya thutopatlisiso ya mofuta wa tshekatsheko e e dirwang mo setlhopheng sa batho ba le mo maemong a mmatota, dipotsolotso tse motlhotlhomisi o botsang dipotso tse di se nang dikarabo tse di rileng le ditokomane tse di sekasekang maitemogelo a sebele, go kgobokantswe deitha go tswa mo basading ba le robedi ba Bantsho ba dingwaga tse di farologaneng tsa go tloga mo dingwageng tse 30 go ya go tse 45. Basadi ba itemogetse

mekgwa e e farologaneng ya mathata (tshotlako ya mo mmeleng, go tlhokomologiwa, tshwaro e e makgwakgwa, tirisodikgoka) mo gae ka nako ya bone ya bongwana. Go tlhopha batsayakarolo go kopantswe tseosampole e motlhotlhomisi o itlhophelang batsayakarolo le tseosampole e batsayakarolo ba tlhotlhomiso ba kopiwang go thusa motlhotlhomisi go batla ba bangwe. Tshekatsheko e e sa akaretsang dipalo e sekasekile dikakanyo tse di raraaneng ka ga tlhokomelo ya ngwana ke mme mo maemong a mo nakong e e fetileng a mathata a a itemogetsweng ka bongwana gammogo le ditlhotlheletsi tsa tshireletso le matshosetsi a pholo ya monagano. Go ya ka kakanyo ya Tiori ya ga Bronfenbrenner e e ka ga Ditlhotlheletsi tsa mo Tikologong tse di Amang Kgolo ya Ngwana, thutopatlisiso e neela kakanyo ya go tlhotlhelediwa ga maitemogelo a a sa siamang a a itemogelwang ka bongwana le ditlhotlheletsi tse di amang go nna mme mo maemong ano. Ditlhaloso tsa kgodiso ya ngwana di bontshitse kamano e se kae fa gare ga tlhomamo le go tlhoka tlhomamo, segolo bogolo mo maemong a tokafalo le dikamano tse di raraaneng tsa balelapa. Diphitlhelelo di tlhagisitse mathata a a raraaneng a go nna le seabe ga rre mo kamanong ya gagwe le ngwana le go ikgogela morago ga rre mo kamanong ya gagwe le ngwana mo maemong a mathata a a itemogelwang ka bongwana mo basading ba Aforika Borwa ba ba belegweng fa gare ga 1980 le 1990. Di neetse go ya pele ditemoso tsa botlhokwa tsa go tlhaloganya seemo se se anameng sa loago le seabe se se fetogang ka iketlo sa borre mo teng ga malapa a Bantsho. Dikamano tsa balelapa tsa botlamedi le tlhokomelo ya balosika di senotse mefutafuta ya maitemogelo, di gatelela seabe sa botlhokwa sa balosika mo go bopeng bongwana. Maitemogelo a bongwana a bomme, gammogo le megopolo e ba nang le yone ka bomme ba bone, di bopile ditsela tse ba itshupang e le bomme le dikakanyo tsa bone tsa go nna mme. Thutopatlisiso e atlanegisa gore go tshwanetse ga akanyediwa mathata a a itemogetsweng ka bongwana ka nako ya dikalafing tse di samaganang le pholo ya monagano ya ga mme.

Mafoko a botlhokwa: *maitemogelo a a sa siamang a bongwana (di-ACE), Bronfenbrenner, go tshwarwa makgwakgwa ga ngwana, go nna mme go go dirwang ka tirisanommogo, tiori e e ka ga ditlhotlheletsi tsa mo tikologong tse di amang kgolo ya ngwana, tshekatsheko e e sa akaretseng dipalo e e ka ga maitemogelo a a rileng, kutlobotlhoko*

Acronyms

ACE	Adverse Childhood Experiences
APA	American Psychology Association
Bt20+	Birth-To-Twenty Plus
CA	Childhood Adversity
CDC	Centre for Disease Control
CDC	Center on the Developing Child
CREC	College Research Ethics Committee
GBV	Gender-based Violence
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IPV	Intimate-partner violence
SDGs	Sustainable Developmental Goals
PTG	Post-traumatic growth
PTSD	Post-traumatic stress disorder
PPCT	Process Person Context Time
PMHP	Perinatal Mental Health Project
WHO	World Health Organization
WiSK	Women in Shirley K
TA	Thematic Analysis
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Contents

Chapter: Introduction

Background

It is estimated that up to 1 billion children (aged 2–17 years) experienced physical, sexual, or emotional violence or neglect globally between the years 2019/2020 (World Health Organization, 2020). Studies in South Africa suggest high rates of individual exposure to adversities. A high proportion of rural South African youth experience adversities of any nature and may experience multiple forms (Jewkes et al., 2010). It has been reported that one in five young boys and girls have experienced some form of sexual abuse in their lifetime (Burton et al., 2015), while another similar report indicated one in three young people have experienced some form of abuse (Artz et al., 2016).

One of the most extensive studies on adverse childhood experiences in young South Africans found that 88% of the sample (n=1223) had experienced at least one form of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), and 35% had experienced at least four (Manyema & Richter, 2019). Unfortunately, victimisation of children does not occur in a vacuum; this often co-occurs with various forms of violations (Artz et al., 2016; Goodman, 2017; Jewkes et al., 2010; Slopen et al., 2010). For example, children who report abuse typically indicate that they experience several forms of abuse (Artz et al., 2016). Exposure to adversity in childhood violates children's basic human rights and influences health outcomes in adult life (Jewkes et al., 2010; Myers et al., 2021) and societal and economic outcomes for a country (Chetty, 2019; World Health Organization, 2020a). These numbers indicate the high prevalence of adversities in South Africa, especially in Black African communities. However, these occurrences of adversities must be viewed in the context of South Africa's historical past. The country's colonial and oppressive past plays a cardinal role in the structure of Black families as well as the gender ideologies that were and are constructed in Black African families. The apartheid and colonialism systems enforced migrant labour and disrupted

African family lives (Richter et al., 2010). The migrant labour system contributed to the roles of mothers and fathers in most African families and family structures. The legacy of apartheid is witnessed in the continuing and increasing poverty, violence, inequality, and other social ills that ravage much of rural and urban Black society. Over the years, there has been a shift to a more humanitarian and democratic society with the new child protection laws and family policy in South Africa (Roman et al., 2016) and other policies aimed at improving the previously disadvantaged. However, the extreme forms of violence that the Black people experienced during years of institutionalized oppression has resulted in violence and abuse of the most vulnerable or 'perceived weakest' of society (Chetty, 2019), which includes women and children.

South Africa's violent past in the context of apartheid can explain the sociopolitical landscape and gender disparities (Gobodo-Madikizela et al., 2014; Morrell et al., 2012). A decolonial feminist perspective on femicide in South Africa reminds us of the preceding "…longer history of settler colonialism and slavery that provides an important, much deeper and necessary contextualisation of the contemporary moment" (2022, p. 4). South Africa's history of political unrest and violence and its resultant racialised inequalities pervaded Black lives in every facet (Boonzaier, 2022), including family structures. The trauma of apartheid affected not only those who personally experienced violence and oppression but also future generations. In a study interrogating Black South African women's traumatic memories of the apartheid period, Segalo (2014) highlighted the importance of recognising the intersectionality of gender, history, and politics in the framing of everyday experiences. This work elucidated a theme of 'family disintegration', which showed the disruption of Black families and women's trauma within this context. Morrell et al. (2012) provided a gendered picture of households in South Africa in the years 1990 and 2002 respectively, and the pattern of family structures. In 1990, 36 percent of children had absent (living) fathers, and in 2002,

the number had moved to 46%. With the pass laws under the apartheid legislation, many Black men and husbands were working far from their homes while their female counterparts had to come up with ways to fend for their children (Segalo, 2014). The violence against Black bodies during the apartheid regime resulted in enactments of violence within some Black households, leading to gendered experiences of violence. It is worth noting that men were regarded as victims of the gendered order of society in the 1990s on the grounds of race, sexual orientation, and poverty (Morrell et al., 2012). Therefore, understandings of violence against women and children need to be contextualised in ideologies of masculinity and femininity, culture, and history. However, women's (and children's) voices are often missing from the narratives of systematic violations. As Borer (2009) posits, in the case of post-apartheid South Africa, there exists a silencing of women's violent experiences during apartheid. Black women's experiences during and post-apartheid are omitted in narrations of the dire impact of trauma on Black families.

Women and children are a marginalised group who fall prey to victimisation in times of collective traumas such as conflicts and war (Gobodo-Madikizela et al., 2014) and global pandemics (Nduna & Tshona, 2021). Although men and women are affected by organised conflicts, such as those experienced during apartheid South Africa, women experience particularly gendered forms of violence (Gobodo-Madikizela et al., 2014). This can be explained by what Nduna and Tshona (2021) describe as poly-violence, to which women are exposed. They describe poly-violence as the "idea that women are at risk of multiple forms of violence at different places" (2021, p. 351). Although we have come a long way in terms of gender inequality and socioeconomic inclusion, women are still at risk of gender disparities, trauma, and violence in various facets of society.

Abrahams et al. (2013) conducted a study comparing 'intimate partner homicide' reported in 1999 and 2009 and investigating whether there were changes in the prevalence

and patterns of female homicide in the two time points. The findings indicated that female homicides were lower in 2009 than in 1990, although levels were high when compared to other countries. The reasons for the decline in incidences were unknown and lack evidence indicating the impact of gender-based violence (GBV) policies and programmes (Abrahams et al., 2013). Despite three decades of democracy in South Africa, women are not free from violence in this context. Gendered experiences of violence, oppression, and inequality persist in the democratic dispensation. In 2020, domestic violence was reported to have increased in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic negatively impacting women and children (Mahlangu et al., 2022). The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated South Africa's already existing inequalities (Bond, 2020) and domestic violence (Mahlangu et al., 2022; Nduna & Tshona, 2021).

In a study conducted in Bloemfontein, South Africa, van Zyl et al. (2017) investigated the extent of trauma exposure as reported by adult patients referred for psychological services at a psychiatric complex. Of the 192 participants in the study, 75,5 % (145) reported past exposure to trauma varying from single to multiple traumas. Interestingly, most of the participants were White (71.9%) and female (67.2%) patients. Gender was a significant demographic variable concerning trauma exposure, which speaks to the intersectionality of women's experiences. As van Zyl et al. (2017, p. 238) report, "women were more vulnerable than men to assault (sexual and physical) as well as traumatic grief". Against this backdrop, I sought to study mothers who experienced these earlier life adversities and to understand how this exposure shapes motherhood and informs its construction. While ACEs have lifelong effects on the child, and that a mother's trauma also affects negatively on their child's development, research attention focusing on the adult-child, and their development in transmissional phases such as parenting, is needed.

Problem Statement

Research shows that ACEs adversely influence children's development in various stages including adolescence and adulthood. In adulthood, childhood trauma can affect parenting (Bailey et al., 2012) and possible psychopathology in offsprings (Plant et al., 2018). ACEs influence a woman's transition to motherhood, causing parenting anxiety (Mathijssen et al., 2024). In the surveyed literature, many of the studies on childhood adversities and maltreatment in the South African context focused on prevalences (Artz et al., 2016; Burton et al., 2015; Jewkes et al., 2010; Manyema & Richter, 2019; Myers et al., 2021; Thurman & Kidman, 2011). Studies were primarily conducted with younger populations and based on quantitative measures of ACEs. There is a lack of studies focusing on mothers who experienced adversities in their childhood and how adversity shapes their parenting in the South African context. There is still much to understanding about Black women's health and wellbeing within research on maternal mental health (Brantley, 2023). South Africa's historical context influenced parenting and disrupted African families. It is therefore important to study Black African families in the context of this historical background and to contextualise experiences of adversities within these families. In this study I focus on black women as a population whose voices have been historically silenced (Segalo, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015; Zungu et al., 2014). Echoing Segalo's (2014) argument that private stories and memories of women who lived through apartheid South Africa needs to be heard and that revisiting the past helps in making sense of the present. I argue that understanding black women's past, including their childhood during this historical time is important for understanding the present health challenges that women encounter. Failure to revisit women's past may hinder their advancement (Segalo, 2014) and efforts aimed at enhancing their health. The exclusion of black women's experiences in the construction of knowledge on

childhood adversities affects the comprehensiveness of mental health knowledge (Spates, 2012).

Furthermore, while strides have been made to address women's health (Mbali & Mthembu, 2012; Wechsberg et al.,2021) interventions addressing women's mental health are in their infancy stage (Abrahams, Jacobs, et al., 2022; Abrahams, Scheneider, et al., 2022). Women's mental health is associated with their parenting efficacy and their relationship with their offspring. Research shows that prioritising women's mental health is essential to reaching Africa's Sustainable Developmental Goals (SDGs) (Ramutsindela & Mickler, 2020). Therefore, interventions should focus on the mother's mental health and assess maternal histories of ACEs and other factors influencing their mental well-being. An understanding of social contextual factors (such as adversities in childhood) is crucial in understanding the risk of mental disorders in South Africa (Slopen et al., 2010) and for the provision of relevant mental health care for mothers. To meet the mental health needs of Black people in South Africa, more research needs to focus on the everyday experiences of "being Black in the world" (Manganyi, 1973).

Purpose of the Study

This study provided an understanding of how motherhood is shaped by ACEs and contextual factors within different systems in which the adult child interacts. Through the ecological theory, factors such as culture and history were considered contextual factors in the nested systems we interact with. The purpose of the study was also to elucidate protective and risk factors of mental health. These were collected from the perceptions of mothers to highlight the contextual factors that play a role in trauma outcomes. It is assumed that the effects of ACEs will be different for each mother given their individual circumstances or environmental influences (i.e., socioeconomic status) (Darling, 2007); however, there may be

commonalities due to historical cohort. This study contributes knowledge on maternal mental health and adds to the scholarship on mothering in the context of trauma. The study also contributes to the body of knowledge on ACEs in South Africa by focusing on Black women's narratives of adversity and their transition to motherhood.

Aims and Objectives

My aim with this study was to explore how adverse childhood experiences and contextual factors shape motherhood in a sample of Black South African women. I was interested in how women with a history of ACEs construct motherhood and position themselves concerning others in their social context. By identifying the protective and risk factors, I wanted to highlight the contextual factors shaping women's mental health outcomes.

The objectives of the research were thus to:

a) Explore how women who experienced adversities in their childhood position themselves as mothers.
b) Understand how women who experienced adversities in their childhood construct motherhood and the factors shaping their constructions.
c) Identify the mental health risk factors for mothers who experienced childhood adversities.
d) Identify mental health protective factors for mothers who have experienced childhood adversities.

The study explored the perceived risk and protective factors for mothers who experienced adversities in their childhood. The overarching aim was thus to explore how women make sense of childhood adversities and how they construct motherhood.

Research Questions

The main research question guiding me through this study was "How do adverse childhood experiences and contextual factors shape motherhood?". This question was supported by the following sub-questions:

1. How do women who experienced adversities in their childhood position themselves as mothers?
2. What are the mental health risk factors for mothers who experienced childhood adversities?
3. What are the mental health protective factors for mothers who experienced childhood adversities?

Outline of the Thesis

In Chapter 2, I discuss and synthesise the literature relevant to understanding adverse childhood experiences and motherhood. The chapter is structured into two sections. In the first section, I will conceptualise Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) and provide a review of ACE studies from the South African context and add a discussion on trauma in context. In the second section, I will discuss motherhood and the ideologies underpinning how we understand mothering. I conclude the chapter by revising studies on motherhood in South Africa.

The theoretical framework guiding this study is discussed in Chapter 3. The chapter begins with a discussion of the development and evolution of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and proceeds to the nested systems constituting the theory. I will then show the relevance and applicability of the theory to the current study.

Chapter 4 discusses the methodology and analysis used in the study, that is, a qualitative enquiry using a collective case study design to explore experiences of childhood

adversities. Thematic analysis was the guiding framework in analysing the data, which I present in Chapters Five to 12.

These provide a descriptive analysis and the themes from individual cases. As for the organisation of case studies, Bromley (1986) asserts that at the heart of a case report should be a description and analysis of the central problems that the case set up to deal with, together with any recommendations based on the analysis. I align with this logic and provide a description and analysis of each story. Each chapter will introduce each participant, their background, some demographic information, and the nature of the adversities and trauma they experienced. The second section will provide analytical themes from each narrative. Chapter 13 will provide a comparative analysis and interpretation of the combined themes. This will be followed by the concluding chapter, Chapter 14, where I summarize the findings and weave together the main arguments of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This study focused on the experiences of mothers with a history of childhood adversities and how they position themselves in their current context of motherhood. This chapter provides a narrative review of the literature organised around the themes of childhood adversities and motherhood. The first part of this chapter begins with a conceptualisation of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE), followed by a review of ACE studies conducted in South Africa. The review then moves on to a discussion of trauma in context, focusing on interlinked concepts such as intergenerational and collective trauma concerning the historical context of this study. In the second part, I move to a theorisation of motherhood, bringing perspectives from psychoanalysis, sociology, and feminism. In the third part, I review studies of motherhood concerning mothering in the context of previous childhood trauma.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE)

The concept of Adverse Childhood Experiences developed from The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study conducted by Felitti et al. (1998) at Kaiser Permanente's San Diego Health Appraisal Clinic in the United States. This seminal study investigated the relationship between childhood abuse and household dysfunction and many of the leading causes of death in adults in the United States. Although there was no definition of ACEs in the study, childhood exposures were categorised into two main defining categories: childhood abuse and household dysfunction. In their questionnaire, childhood abuse included questions on psychological and sexual abuse, as well as sexual contact abuse. Household dysfunction included exposure to substance abuse, mental illness, violent treatment of mother or stepmother, and criminal behaviour in the household. The findings from the study indicated

associations between the afore mentioned childhood exposures and health risk behaviour, health status, and disease in adulthood (Felitti et al., 1998).

Over the years, research from various disciplines largely concurred with the findings from the original study and expanded the categories of ACEs. Moreover, the concept of ACEs has been operationalized and expanded to give conceptual clarity and consistency of findings (Alhowaymel et al., 2021; Kalmakis & Chandler, 2014). According to Kalmakis and Chandler (2014), ACEs are defined as "childhood events, varying in severity and often chronic, occurring within a child's family or social environment that cause harm or distress, thereby disrupting the child's physical and psychological health and development" (p.1495). They further expanded the items on the ACEs questionnaire to include exposures to community violence, bullying, and poverty. However, this definition was mainly based on ACEs research in the United States. It did not account for the varied social and cultural contexts in which ACEs occur internationally. Alhowaymel et al. (2021) further developed a definition from a global perspective by adding that "ACEs are influenced by globally diverse cultural, social, environmental, and economic factors that affect individuals' health worldwide" (p..22). This is in addition to the definition above from (Kalmakis & Chandler, 2014). This definition by Alhowaymel et al. (2021) is beneficial for recognizing the context within which ACEs occur. It applies to developing countries such as South Africa. The definition of adversity has also been expanded beyond the categories in the initial study to include community and systematic stresses (Center on the Developing Child, 2022). Such stressful "experiences include multiple types of abuse; neglect; violence between parents or caregivers; other kinds of serious household dysfunction such as alcohol and substance abuse; and peer, community and collective violence" (World Health Organization, 2020). Other definitions of ACEs in research acknowledge the effects of adversities on a child's neurodevelopment. For example, Linden and LeMoult (2022. p.715) defined ACE as "a

broad umbrella term that describes the presence of severe negative environmental events that require significant emotional, cognitive, or neurobiological adaptation by an average child."

Furthermore, scholars have used different terms to refer to childhood adversities, such as child maltreatment, child abuse (physical, sexual or emotion), childhood maltreatment, trauma, victimisation, developmental trauma, and misfortune. Kalmakis & Chandler (2013) argue that although these terms that describe different aspects of childhood adversities have similarities and common characteristics, they do not capture the depth of the term adverse childhood experiences. I used adverse childhood experiences and childhood adversities interchangeably as umbrella terms covering child maltreatment. To narrow the scope of my study, the categories are chronic neglect, physical, sexual, emotional abuse, and exposure to violence (in the home or community) during childhood.

Since the 1998 ACEs study, much research has been conducted on ACEs and their influence on various aspects of the victim's life course. Much of the research shows the prevalence of ACEs in various populations and their association with health problems or risk factors. Some outcomes or issues concerning ACE include behavioural problems (Clarkson Freeman, 2014; Nazareth et al., 2022), negative impact on later life opportunities (Metzler et al., 2017), adult mental health concerns (Kaminer et al., 2022; Leiva et al., 2022), adverse chronic health outcomes (Alhowaymel et al., 2023), and intergenerational transmission of trauma (Letourneau et al., 2019; Mcdonnell & Valentino, 2016) and parenting difficulties (Bailey et al., 2012). One of the characteristics of ACEs is their cumulative effect (Hamby et al., 2021; Kalmakis & Chandler, 2014). Children will likely be exposed to more than one adversity in their lifetime. This cumulative exposure to adversities is primarily associated with issues within the family contexts, including family dysfunction (Vervoort-Schel et al., 2021). The more ACEs a child is exposed to, the greater the effect on their mental and physical health as well as their behavioural outcomes (Kalmakis & Chandler, 2015). In

addition to health outcomes, ACEs can negatively affect later education, employment and income, which influences one's propensity to live a meaningful life (Metzler et al., 2017).

It is also worth noting that studies of ACEs are mainly within the positivist paradigm using objective ratings. However, Kalmakis and Chandler (2014) argue that the severity of these experiences varies according to children's individual interpretations. Therefore, qualitative studies of individual interpretations of these experiences are valuable in understanding risk factors and subjective meanings. Furthermore, these authors define ACEs as childhood events that harm the child's physical or psychological health and development. The events occur within the child's family or social environment and vary in intensity. Similar to the ecological model, their model of ACEs "represents the social environment that surrounds the family and the family environment that surrounds the developing child" (Kalmakis & Chandler, 2014, p. 1496).

The focus of my study was on mothers with a history of childhood adversities. It provides qualitative accounts of their experiences and perceptions of motherhood. This population has been studied in other contexts, with studies focusing on aspects like attachment and the impact of earlier trauma on children. Research shows that children of mothers with a history of ACEs are at risk of developmental issues (Mcdonnell & Valentino, 2016; Sun et al., 2017). Furthermore, women who have experienced childhood adversities may be particularly vulnerable to higher levels of persistent depressive symptoms (Letourneau et al., 2019; Mcdonnell & Valentino, 2016) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms during pregnancy (Atzl et al., 2019). The depressive symptoms influence an infant's emotional well-being (Mcdonnell & Valentino, 2016). In addition, exposure to adversities in childhood may cause disruptions in forming long-term attachments in adulthood (Anda et al., 2006). This may influence the mother-child attachment relationship

when women transition to motherhood. The life-long consequences of childhood trauma will be expounded on in the section below.

ACEs Research from South Africa

As discussed above, research on ACEs developed in the 1990s with the CDC-Kaiser Permanente Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study (Felitti et al. (1998). Although this concept was coined elsewhere, research from developmental psychology in South Africa predates this conceptualisation. Adversities experienced by South African children have been studied, although not extensively. I draw on two books in a sequel that highlighted research on childhood and adversity in South Africa (Dawes & Donald, 1994) and interventions addressing adversity through various programme (Dawes et al., 2000). These publications are important to the focus of my research as they describe psychological research on childhood adversity and highlight the theoretical relevance of alternative perspectives such as that offered by Bronfenbrenner's theory. Regarding interventions, various works are shown that are "useful in understanding how children's development is shaped by material, social and cultural context" (Dawes & Donald, 2000, p. 3). Considering South African's history, many children were, and still are, at a disadvantage in terms of standards of optimal development. This is due to the psychological consequences of adversities they are exposed to, which include political and interpersonal violence. The exposure of children to adversities violates their basic human rights (Jewkes et al., 2010) and justifies great research exploration and interventions.

In post-apartheid South Africa, there has been a transformation in the structure of families which impacts the lives of children (Makiwane et al., 2016). Research in this context suggests that children are highly exposed to adversities, although some are not based on the definition of ACEs from the original studies (Manyema & Richter, 2019). For example, Jewkes et al. (2010) investigated five dimensions of adversity, namely, emotional neglect,

emotional abuse, physical neglect/hardship, physical abuse, and sexual abuse in a sample of 1367 men and 1415 women aged 15–26 years in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. The study found that all forms of adversity were common among men and women and enhanced the risk of adverse health outcomes. Furthermore, the Optimus Study reported on child abuse, violence, and neglect in South Africa, presenting the first-ever representative data on child maltreatment (Burton et al., 2015). Results in the report indicated that by the ages of 15 to 17 years, many South African children would have experienced abuse (sexual, physical, or emotional), neglect, or would have been exposed to high rates of violence. In addition, recent studies reported a high prevalence of exposure to ACEs in South Africa, from national and provincial surveys report high prevalence (Manyema & Richter, 2019; Naicker et al., 2017; Nazareth et al., 2022) and associations with various outcomes. ACEs have been associated with suicidal behaviour (Bruwer et al., 2014; Cluver et al., 2015; Orri et al., 2022), probable anxiety and probable depression (Craig et al., 2022), child behavioural problems (Nazareth et al., 2022) and deviant behaviour in young adults (Holtzhausen-Campbell, 2021).

However, there are mediating factors in predicting later life outcomes for adults who experienced adversities in their childhood, such as sociodemographic, economic and environmental factors. There are also contradicting findings regarding the impact of ACEs. For example, Kobayashi et al. (2020) found contrasting outcomes in their study investigating the relationship between ACEs and cognitive functioning in a population of older adults in rural South Africa. The results showed no associations between the reported ACEs and cognition in the respondents. Interestingly, 45% of the sample reported experiencing no adversity (Kobayashi et al., 2020). The result could have been influenced by the forms of adversity assessed in this cohort, memory, and under-reporting. The study evaluated these adversities: parental unemployment; parents arguing or fighting often; a parent drinking excessively, using drugs, or having mental health; and physical abuse from parents.

Nevertheless, data from national survey and provincial surveys show variations in ACEs across South Africa, which can be attributed to factors such as economic disparities and development. Craig et al. (2022) investigated the prevalence of probable depression and probable anxiety (not based on clinical diagnosis but on symptomatology) and associations with ACEs and demographics and found variations in prevalence. For example, they found an unexpectedly high prevalence of ACEs in the Western Cape, although this is one of the wealthiest provinces in South Africa. This is because adversities are associated with poverty. However, the authors speculated that this high prevalence was due to the distance barrier in access to health care in the Western Cape (Craig et al., 2022).

It is worth noting that three studies reviewed here were based on data from the Birth-To-Twenty Plus Study (Bt20+) (Manyema et al., 2018; Naicker et al., 2017; Orri et al., 2022). The Birth-To-Twenty Plus (Bt20+) Study is a longitudinal multidisciplinary study aimed to track a cohort of urban children for ten years. The study aimed to track the growth, health, well-being and educational progress of the sample from SOWETO, a township in Johannesburg. Although the study is not a national study, the data provided crucial information in democratic South Africa and has impacted policy development. The study has been a source of reference for several policy decisions in South Africa (Richter et al., 2007).

The reviewed literature within the South African context provides evidence for the high prevalence of ACEs in this context. Furthermore, research shows the importance of contextual factors in measuring and understanding ACEs. This includes sociopolitical factors, family structures, health, and economic factors. One such health concern affecting exposure to ACEs is HIV. Nazareth et al. (2022) and Cluver et al. (2015) expanded the constructs from the original ACE questionnaire to include caregiver HIV status in their measure of ACEs. Parental AIDS-illness and death are common experiences in ACE studies in the sub-Saharan

region (Cluver et al., 2015), and South Africa is one of the largest hyperendemic settings globally (Ndumo et al., 2022).

Furthermore, ACEs and HIV have been identified as consistent risk factors for intimate-partner violence (IPV) (Ndumo et al., 2022). These studies show the relationship between ACEs and adults' health and wellbeing in various samples in South Africa. However, there is a gap in research exploring the role of ACEs in women's experiences of motherhood in this context. There is a lack of studies focusing on the outcomes of ACEs on a mother's mental health and wellbeing. The reviewed studies are largely from a positivist approach marked by prevalence studies and quantitative data from surveys. Qualitative accounts of ACEs and their impact on motherhood will further expand the research on childhood adversities in South Africa and their influence on psychological development.

The Lifelong Impact of Trauma and Earlier Childhood Adversities

Trauma is generally defined as an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape, or natural disaster (American Psychology Association [APA], 2024). Shock and denial are typical reactions immediately after the event, while long-term reactions include many erratic emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships, and physical symptoms such as headaches or nausea. In psychology, the study of trauma has been primarily centred on PTSD. Post traumatic stress disorder is a mental condition that may occur in people who experienced a traumatic event or series of events. Prager proposes that "…trauma is a memory illness" that "…manifests itself symptomatically in the present triggered by a memory that typically remains unconscious" (cited in Gobodo-Madikizela, 2016, p. 15). Trauma and its effects on our development in different life stages have been well-studied from various psychological perspectives. Studies from neurosciences show that trauma at different stages in life has different effects on brain development (Bremner, 2006). However, childhood is when the brain is most sensitive to experiences and subsequently to positive and

negative influences (Perry, 2002). Theorists such as Freud and Erikson laid the foundations of our current understanding of human behaviour. Freud's psychoanalytical theory (1856-1939) is credited as the most comprehensive regarding human functioning (Moore, Viljoen & Meyer, 2017) and helped shape current views on childhood and its role in understanding personhood.

On the other hand, Erikson (1902-1994) is renowned for his work on human development, theorising that humans develop through six stages because of genetic and social factors (Moore, Viljoen, & Meyer, 2017). Over the years, new findings in neurosciences, psychology, and medicine have revealed how childhood adversities, in particular, can change an individual's biological make-up (Bremner, 2006; Nakazawa, 2015; Perry, 2002). In addition to the intrapersonal and biological impact of adversities, there are social and functional aspects of development (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Dawes & Donald, 2000).

Childhood trauma plays a vital role in the quality of attachment relationships that will develop between a child and mother, and later relationships with others (Bradfield, 2011). A child's social, emotional, cognitive, and physical experiences will shape their neural systems in ways that influence lifetime functioning (Perry, 2002). Experiencing a traumatic childhood without the availability of a supportive adult can lead to toxic stress. This refers to the effects of excessive activation of the stress response systems, which can lead to long-lasting damage to the child's body and brain (Center on the Developing Child, 2022). Bremner's (2006) review of pre-clinical and clinical studies provided great insight into the effects of traumatic stress on the brain. The review showed that traumatic stress is associated with long-lasting changes in different areas of the brain.

In the field of ACE, Felitti et al. (1998)'s seminal work identified that research had not explored the relationship between health risk behaviour and disease in adulthood and the

role of earlier childhood adversities. Their study then found "a strong graded relationship between the breadth of exposure to abuse or household dysfunction during childhood and multiple risk factors for several of the leading causes of death in adults" (Felitti et al., 1998, p. 245). In addition to health risks, it has been established that early childhood adversities also have a social and economic impact. Early trauma and exposure to life stressors during childhood have a pervasive influence on adult functioning (Mcdonnell & Valentino, 2016). Trauma such as emotional neglect in childhood (Talmon et al., 2019) and unresolved maternal trauma (lyengar et al., 2014; Mcdonnell & Valentino, 2016) can have antagonistic effects on self-identity and adult functioning. In addition, studies show that exposure to adversities can have dire consequences for the victim, such as the following: risky sexual behaviour (Burton et al., 2015; Mcdonnell & Valentino, 2016), substance abuse disorder (Goodman, 2017; Jewkes et al., 2010), and an impact on life opportunities (including education, employment, and income) (Metzler et al., 2016). Stress in a developing child can lead to problems such as alcoholism, depression, eating disorders, unsafe sex, HIV/AIDS, heart disease, cancer, and other chronic diseases in later adult life (World Health Organization, 2020b).

In contrast to the negative outcomes reported above, it is also known that stress can become a channel for positive changes such as post-traumatic growth (PTG) (Tranter et al., 2021). Survivors of childhood traumas can find meaning in their experiences and lead positive lives. Post-traumatic growth refers to "positive psychological change experienced due to the struggle with highly challenging life circumstances" (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004, p. 1). The concept of PTG differs from resilience, the latter referring to people's ability to begin with life after experiencing adversity (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Tranter et al.'s (2021) study found that following exposure to ACEs, high levels of resilience and viewing the experience as a positive identity change may determine positive changes reported. The

findings indicated that resilience and event centrality were significant mediators of positive (PTG) but not negative (PTS) outcomes. The study addressed the gap in research determining what influences the likelihood of PTG and post-traumatic stress (PTS) symptoms following ACEs, although the frequency of ACEs was low. Research specific to positive and negative outcomes in mothers is important in understanding the mental health risk and protective factors in this population and to halt the intergeneration transmission of trauma.

Psychology and psychotherapy help us understand the link between childhood wounds and adult emotional problems, and understanding this link is also essential for healing from the past (Nakazawa, 2015). However, in a country such as South Africa, much of the population will never receive such psychological or psychotherapeutic services. Data from a recently published study indicate that the South African government spends 5% of its total health budget on mental health (Docrat et al., 2019). It was found that the government's mental health spending structure does not speak to the lived realities of those who rely on public health services (October 2021). Much of the mental health budget is allocated to psychiatric-level services and less at the community level, which results in further costs for readmissions of inpatients (Docrat et al., 2019). It is worth nothing that the social and occupational outcomes of childhood adversities can ultimately slow a country's economic and social development (World Health Organization, 2020a). Therefore, trauma and earlier experiences of adversities are related to a country's development.

Intergenerational Transmissions of Trauma

Extensive research has been conducted to understand trauma or suffering, its transmission from one generation to another and posttraumatic growth or resilience. Some interrelated concepts in the literature on transmissions of trauma include intergenerational trauma, transgenerational trauma, collective trauma, and historical and cultural trauma. Cultural trauma is "an overwhelming, often ongoing physical or psychological assault by an

oppressive dominant group on another group's cultural resources through force, threats of force, or oppressive policies" (Subica & Link, 2022, p. 1). Hirschberger (2018) defines collective trauma as the psychological reactions to a traumatic event that affects an entire society reflecting a historical event and its memory. According to the APA dictionary (2023, para 1), intergenerational trauma (also referred to as historical trauma, multigenerational trauma, secondary traumatisation) is "a phenomenon in which the descendants of a person who has experienced a terrifying event show adverse emotional and behavioural reactions to the event that are similar to those of the person himself or herself."

An underlining part of these concepts is that parts of the effects of these traumas as transferable to later generations. Trauma can be passed on in different ways, including biologically and, as Gobodo-Madikizela (2016. p3) notes, in "…subtle ways through stories or silences, through unarticulated fears and the psychological scars that are often left unacknowledged". Considering these conceptual foundations, the discussion here focuses on research on the impact of collective forms of trauma and goes on to an understanding of the intergenerational impact of interpersonal trauma with a focus on mother-child relationships. Interpersonal trauma refers an assault by a person on an individual's health (Subica & Link, 2022).

The phenomenon of intergenerational transmission of trauma has mainly been studied in different contexts, including mass or collective traumas. Researchers have studied different populations, including descendants of the Holocaust, the Khmer Rouge killings in Cambodia, the Rwandan genocide, the displacement of American Indians and the enslavement of African Americans (DeAngelis, 2019), the apartheid oppression (Adonis, 2016; Gobodo-Madikizela et al., 2014), and Gukurahundi in Zimbabwe. These various contexts in which collective trauma was classified vary in the nature of the trauma and its psychological impact.

As such, in the context of children's development, those who experienced violence in one context cannot be likened to their counterparts in another context of violence.

However, Gobodo-Madikizela (2016) posits that the reference point for much of the scholarship and knowledge on historical trauma and memory has primarily been the Holocaust and other Eurocentric case studies, although research in other contexts is developing. In her book*,* the different contributors offer various perspectives by focusing on other historical traumas (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2016). Research on the transmission of trauma from one generation to another shows that the "…effects are not only psychological but familial, social, cultural, neurobiological and possibly even genetic" (DeAngelis, 2019).

In South Africa, the apartheid legacy continues to resonate with the current generation. Adonis (2016) conducted a study exploring experiences of intergenerational trauma among children and grandchildren of victims of gross human rights violations in the apartheid-era. The findings showed that children and grandchildren of victims of apartheid trauma experience secondary traumatisation, a sense of hopelessness and helplessness, as well as an economic impact. The studies by Adonis (2016), Gobodo-Madikizela et al. (2014), and Borer (2009) provided valuable insights on the transgenerational trauma through the lenses of the Truth and Reconciliation omission (TRC) after the 1994 democratic dispensation. However, it is also important to research the experiences of those whose stories remain untold. This includes many South African families who experienced systemic violence, which led to domestic violence, abandonment, neglect, or maltreatment.

A growing theme in the literature on intergenerational trauma has been studies investigating the link between parents' trauma and traumatic outcomes in their children (Bradfield, 2011). This canon bears relevance to my research as it provides an understanding of interpersonal trauma and its impact on an individual's experiences within their

socioecological context. This study Contextualised women's individual trauma (i.e., adverse childhood experiences) because of their historical past to foreground their present by focusing on experiences of motherhood and mothering. Having been born or raised in the years of systematic oppression, the experience of these women as adults have much to offer to the field of historical trauma and ways of healing. Exploring the trauma experienced through apartheid (collective or individual) can be the basis for healing and reparation, allowing us to move between the systematic and the individual. Thus, studying intergenerational trauma will enable us to look beyond and between intrapersonal impact (and pathology) to collective societal and systematic impacts of trauma.

Research shows that unresolved trauma may interfere with a mother's expectations and perceptions of her child, as well as her ability to sensitively respond to the child, thus compromising the development of secure attachment in the child (lyengar et al., 2014). Intergenerational relations between mother and daughter may cause tension, which may affect mothering practices (Moore, 2013). Trauma unresolved is trauma transferred. The abused may become perpetrators of abuse in their adult lives, passing down trauma from one generation to another (World Health Organization, 2020a). Mcdonnell and Valentino (2016) showed the intergenerational transmission of trauma from a pregnant mother to her infant. Maternal trauma history and depressive symptoms during pregnancy were associated with maladaptive infant socioemotional symptoms. Maternal ACEs have been linked with adverse health outcomes for women in South Africa. In a study at a KwaZulu Natal hospital, Bhengu et al. (2020) found that ACE plays a role in women's perinatal substance use outcomes. A mother's use of substances affects a child's development. Maternal socio-economic status, marital status, and age have also been significantly associated with experiencing at least one form of ACE (Manyema & Richter, 2019).

Furthermore, single maternal marital status has been associated with children experiencing more ACEs when compared with children from dual-partner families (either married or live-in partners) (Manyema & Richter, 2019). While these studies indicate the impact of adversities on children's development, on the victims' later life, and the societal level, there is a scarcity of research focusing on how adversities influence the adult-child's transition to motherhood in the South Africa context. Trauma such as emotional neglect in childhood (Talmon et al., 2019) and unresolved maternal trauma (lyengar et al., 2014) can harm self-identity and adult functioning.

Self-identity is an important element in motherhood as social identity as a woman's personal (self) and social identity changes. However, mothers can re-organise these insecure attachments to form secure attachments with their children. Resolved trauma can form secure attachments in the adult child, which indicates resilience. Intergenerational trauma refers to the process by which elements of a parent's traumatic experiences are passed on to their children (Bradfield, 2011). It is thus important to understand these processes by which parents transfer elements of their trauma and how they navigate their lives.

Motherhood

Motherhood has significantly been studied from multiple perspectives, including feminism, psychodynamics, and sociology. However, feminist constructions dominate the theorising and empirical research on motherhood in contexts such as the Unites States (Arendell, 2000) and South Africa (Frizelle, 1999; Frizelle & Kell, 2010; Parry, 2022). In this section, I discuss these multiple perspectives in conceptualising and theorising motherhood. Motherhood is often conceptualised in terms of the mother's nurturing and caring roles within families and communities. A mother is generally seen as a provider, nurturer, and protector. In psychology, psychodynamic theories and attachment theories essentially guided the theorising of motherhood concerning the mother-child relationship and personality

development. These earlier theories showed that the initial relationship between the infant and caregiver (often the mother) serves as the foundation for an infant's mental health. Bowlby (1988) argued that women's transitions to becoming mothers can be taken as an automatic and 'natural' instinct, however these notions takeaway the complexities of this transitional process. This transition involves many challenges, such as forming maternal identity and attachment to the infant, which require adjustment (Talmon et al., 2019). It is also important to consider the contextual factors in which a woman transitions into motherhood, such as trauma, socioeconomic factors, history, and culture.

Mothers who have been neglected as children may find their own transition to motherhood a difficult one. As indicated by psychological theories such as Bowlby's (1969) theory of attachment, Schwerdtfeger and Goff (2007), and Freud's psychodynamics (1982), the initial relationship between the infant and caregiver serves as the foundation for an infant's mental health. Schwerdtfeger and Goff's (2007) review showed that early maternal mental representations of the caregiver influence how the mother experiences her infant, which may influence her interaction and attachment to the child. These studies focus on the biological component of motherhood and the mother-child relationship; however, motherhood is also socially constructed. As a social construct, motherhood involves societal definitions and norms as well as how we understand and prescribe roles and expectations to women who become mothers. These norms and expectations are vastly influenced by historical, religious, economic, and political factors. The ideologies of motherhood are discussed in detail below.

Ideologies of Motherhood

Ideology as a social construct is widely used in various disciplines and sometimes without operationalising the term. However, the definition(s) of ideology have been the subject of much debate within politics, sociology, and psychology, evidenced by the

"definitional analysis" from various scholars (Gerring, 1997; Jost, 2006; Roucek, 1944). Ideologies are the patterns of thought and every philosophical or other cultural product belonging to a specific social group with which it originated and with whose existence it is linked to (Roucek, 1944). Furthermore, Roucek (1944, p. 479) asserts that "every ideological construction involves the projection of a certain ideal into the future, into the evaluation of the present, and into the past." Thus, motherhood as a social construct involves ideals projected on women who mother as well as ways of evaluating past and current practices. As such, mothering work (childcare and domestic work) largely shapes how we conceive of motherhood and what it means to be a mother (O'Reilly, 2010). Ideologies of motherhood include the roles and practices of mothers as well as how motherhood is understood (Arendell, 2000; Williamson et al., 2023).

Motherhood begins with the event of a woman conceiving. Although this is essentially a biological occurrence, it is also an identity and social construction (Collett, 2005). Women develop an identity and perception of themselves as mothers, which is often concerning their new role (Emmanuel et al., 2011; Mercer, 2004; Williamson et al., 2023). The role is linked to societal and cultural expectations and norms underpinned by ideologies. One of the most dominant ideologies is that of *intensive mothering* (IM) coined by Sharon Hays in her groundbreaking book (Hays, 1997). The tenets of this ideology extend the notion that mothers should be the child's central caregivers, that they must spend much time and energy on the child, and that mothering and professional work are separate (Hays, 1997). In this perspective, women are expected to be self-sacrificing and all-caring, perpetuating the ideas of the ideal "good" mother. Being perceived as a good mother is central to women's identities, and motherhood is both a social and personal identity (Collett, 2005; Elliott et al., 2015; Johnston & Swanson, 2006; Williamson et al., 2023). Though historically dominant in

the US, IM ideologies are widely shared in various societies despite cultural contradictions and alternative practices (Arendell, 2000; S. Hays, 1997).

Since Hays (1997), scholars have interrogated how and why women adhere to intensive mothering (Autret et al., 2023). In their content analysis of intensive motherhood literature, Autret et al. found that studies have focused on the possible resistance of this ideology and have not explored the perspective that women adhere to this ideology to resist neoliberalism, which shows their agency. Furthermore, research into intensive mothering and parenting suggests that aspects of this style of mothering and its beliefs can be detrimental to women's mental health (Rizzo et al., 2013). This is in addition to feminist scholars challenging the dichotomy of productive work and reproductive work by questioning the privatisation of motherhood (O'Reilly, 2010). As more women enter the labour market, ideals of intensive mothering have been challenged and even reconstructed. Women position themselves concerning ideological expectations within homes and workplaces (Johnston & Swanson, 2006). Women from Johnston and Swanson (2006) defined intensive mothering ideologies from their subjective positions in line with their work status. For example, at-home mothers constructed good mothering in terms of their accessibility to their children, part-time mothers emphasise quality communication with their children, while mothers in full-time employment emphasised quality time spent empowering their children. Working mothers want to be ideal workers while maintaining and renegotiating their role as mothers.

Similarly, Christopher's (2012) findings showed how women reframed caregiving and mothering in what the researcher termed *extensive mothering.* In extensive mothering, single and married mothers delegate care tasks, find different meanings in work, and refer to their own needs (Christopher, 2012). However, it is worth noting that ideals of intensive mothering mainly reflect the realities of White middle-class women in nuclear family contexts. For example, Johnston and Swanson's sample included a majority (87%) of White women

(Johnston & Swanson, 2006) similar to Christopher's sample (47%). Furthermore, scholars have documented alternative constructions of motherhood in Black African American culture (Collins, 1987) and conceptions of alternative motherhood in various cultures and contexts (Peach, 1998). Afrocentric ideologies of motherhood include the concepts of "othermother" and "community othermother" described in Collin's work within the African American context (Collins, 1987, 1998).

Other mothers are those who assist blood mothers in caring for children and sometimes foster children within the kin relatives or the community. Community othermothers care for the welfare of children at the community level and are often involved in civic and activist work. This notion relates to collective mothering also identified in studies in the global South (Magwaza, 2009; Robinson, 2014). Collective mothering is supported in certain cultures in South Africa, where childcare is shared amongst the (extended) family and the community (Robinson, 2014), although it is a way of being as opposed to an ideology. Magwaza (2009) reflects on her experiences as a Black woman and the 'multi-mother' "role expectation within the family and work contexts. She reflects on extended mothering and the expectation to assume a mothering role, and the strains goes along with these expectations. The idea of "extended mothering" (Magwaza, 2009) is related to "community othermother" (Collins, 1987) in terms of their focus on women's active mothering role in community work.

Notwithstanding the challenges associated with the cost of mothering work, the forms of mothering outlined above underpin the need for and importance of support networks that provide emotional, practical, and social support to mothers and families. Although intensive mothering is dominant in literature, alternative mothering must be given attention to bring various realities to what we know about mothering.

Moreover, stereotypes and cultural narratives about the ideal mother can contribute to societal expectations, reinforcing certain behaviours and roles while marginalising others. To echo Dawes and Donalds (1974), "each society will have certain dominant and subsidiary (usually competing) ideologies which are inserted into everyday as well as official discourse and are visible in people's practices and expressed believed" (p. 8). Furthermore, social institutions such as families are the vehicle through which ideologies are conserved and transmitted. In this discussion I reviewed literature on the dominant ideologies and discourses around motherhood in the U.S as well as the African context.

Motherhood Research in South Africa

Motherhood and mothering have long been the subject of research interest, with perspectives mainly from the Western world (Arendell, 2000; Kawash et al., 2011; O'Reilly, 2010). Although motherhood has been arguably neglected in South African scholarship, the topic has received some research attention since Walker's (1995) publication *Conceptualizing Motherhood in Twentieth Century South Africa*. Researchers such as Spjeldnæs (2021) argue that the concept of mothering in this context is the least theorised as compared to fathering, masculinities, and feminism concerning the institution of families. The premises for mothering have changed in the country and beyond since Walker's contribution at the onset of the post-apartheid era (Spjeldnæs, 2021). Over the years local studies have focused on themes such as the conceptualisations of motherhood (Moore, 2013; Spjeldnæs, 2021), ideals of motherhood (Damaske, 2013; Frizelle, 1999; Frizelle & Kell, 2010; Mograbi et al., 2023), lone motherhood (Ntshongwana et al., 2015), incarcerated mothers (Parry, 2022), and working mothers (Damaske, 2013; Posel & van der Stoep, 2008).

Motherhood research from various perspectives in South Africa is important to recentre the marginalised and taken-for-granted experiences, including the everyday experiences of working mothers, teenage mothers, Black African mothers, and incarcerated

mothers. In their theoretical paper, Spjeldnæs (2021) noted that the search relating to the literature on mothering in South Africa was connected to topics such as HIV and AIDS, domestic violence, or psychopathologies. However, motherhood was not a unit of analysis in some studies, adding to the lack of theorising on the idea of mothering and motherhood in South Africa. In another study, Moore (2013) explored the conceptualisation of motherhood, drawing from three generations of women from Cape Town, South Africa. The study adds to the limited body of knowledge on conceptualisations of motherhood in South Africa through the voices of Black women. Their findings showed continuities of mothering practices and changes in the model of 'good mothering' in the younger generation of women. The study offers insight into how Black women construct motherhood in the juxtaposition of urban and rural lives given structural and cultural changes.

Studying marginalised experiences in the South African context requires contextualisation and multiple perspectives. Mothering in the South African context and African communities should be understood in complex and varied circumstances, such as being lone, absent, replaced, shared, marginalised, and disrupted (Spjeldnæs, 2021). Similarly, Parry (2022), studying the gendered role of motherhood in the life histories of incarcerated South African women, argued that understanding the women's actions requires "an understanding of the country's association with racist, patriarchal customs and inequitable societal heritages in the creation of the stereotypical gender role of womanhood and motherhood" (p. 287). While we look back to look forward, the changing status and role of women in families and social structures characterises current mothering practices. Women in the current age focus on reaching higher education and financial independence before marriage (Moore, 2013). Women's participation in the labour force is increasing, although there is still a gap between women's and men's involvement. South African women's participation in the labour force, either as employed or looking for work, stood at 54,3%

while men stood at 64,9% (Statistics South Africa, 2023). This growth has implications for families and mothering work. However, the participation of women in the workplace "need not undermine cultural expectations that women's work should be connected to family obligations because ideals of caregiving have expanded to include financial provision" (Damaske, 2013, p. 441).

Black women are increasingly becoming migrant labourers, leaving their children in the care of others, usually grandmothers and aunts (Hall & Posel, 2019; Posel & van der Stoep, 2008; Spjeldnæs et al., 2014). However, many black African children have been reported to be living with their mothers in the absence of fathers (Hall & Posel, 2019; Spjeldnæs et al., 2014). This indicates a continuation of migrant labour in post-apartheid South Africa, and more so among women and mothers. I concur with Mograbi et al. (2023), who stated that motherhood in South Africa is a site for transition and that mothers constantly negotiate issues of culture, ethnicity, class, and education. In addition, as indicated by the literature above, women also grapple with sociopolitical issues and the changing family dynamics that affect their everyday lives.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I reviewed the literature organised around the themes of childhood adversities and motherhood, particularly focusing on South Africa. The literature elucidated how childhood traumas can impact adults and their experiences of motherhood, highlighting the prevalence of childhood adversities and their associations with adverse health outcomes. Childhood trauma can have long-term effects on brain development and functioning, affecting social, emotional, cognitive, and physical well-being. Adversities in childhood can lead to toxic stress, impacting relationships and overall health. Studies have linked childhood trauma to various health risks and social challenges in adulthood, with potential intergenerational effects. While trauma can lead to negative outcomes, it can also result in

post-traumatic growth, where individuals find meaning and positivity in their lives. The concept of motherhood has been extensively studied from feminist, psychological, and sociological perspectives, however there is a gap in research in South Africa focusing on how trauma informs motherhood. However, the literature shows that societal norms and expectations influence the construction of motherhood as a social identity, with ideologies like intensive mothering impacting how motherhood is perceived and practiced.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

Introduction

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory served as a guiding framework for this work. Studies of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) have been mainly theorised from neurosciences (biological perspectives) and within developmental psychology with evidence from western society. And as alluded to in Chapter 2, motherhood has been studied from various perspectives from psychology, sociology, and feminist scholars. Considering the aim of this study, which was understand how adverse childhood experiences and contextual factors shape motherhood, I used lenses of developmental psychology. Within developmental psychology Western theories are classified as stage theories or those of continuous change (Gillibrand et al., 2016). Stage theories are based on the premise that people progress through a pattern of different stages. Continuous or lifespan theories are based on the idea that development is a lifelong process from childhood to adulthood.

The other theories (continuous or stages) offer various perspectives on development including the psychodynamics, biological, learning, cognitive, and integrative perspectives, respectively (Gillibrand et al., 2016). Prominent theorists of human development who still dominate the discipline include Piaget (1896-1980), Vygotsky (1896-1934), and Bowlby (1907-1990) (McLeod, 2023). Bowlby's contributions remain instrumental to our understanding of the disruption of early bonding between and its likely effects on affectional development in children (Dawes, 1994). From an African perspective, I acknowledge Nsamaneng's theory of human ontogenesis, which recognises the social ecology in which human development occurs (Nsamenang, 2006). The idea of sociogenesis is defined as individual development perceived and explained as a function of social, not biological factors. This thinking does not discount the role of nature but assumes that biology underpins

social ontogenesis. Nsamenang (1995) emphasises the role of culture in development and offers an *eco-cultural model* as a conceptual framework that considers culture and local views of human nature and development.

Nevertheless, the theories above offer varied but limiting perspectives on the inquiry in this study. To foreground the study, this chapter will begin with a discussion of the development and evolution of the ecological systems theory and will be followed by an overview of the nested systems constituting the theory and their bearing on my research.

Theoretical Background

Bronfenbrenner began his work on the ecology of human development in the 1970s as a response to the limitations of theories of development. He argued that earlier approaches to research, particularly on developmental psychology, studied " ... behaviour of strange children in strange situations with strange adults" (Bronfenbrenner, 1974; 1977). He also critiqued the observations of human behaviour in experimental settings. He argued these were limited to interactions between one or two beings at a time within one setting. It is worth noting, however, that he did not disregard the scientific knowledge from experiential observations. He argued that much of the prevailing research within developmental psychology was conducted in 'strange' experimental conditions and offered limited answers to questions of public policy (Bronfenbrenner, 1974). He further argued for the importance of ecological validity. Ecological validity in research means that the research “must be carried out with the right participants in what resembles a real-world setting” (Gillibrand et al., 2016, p. 35). The existing models did not consider the interactions between the systems or processes of reciprocity within the developing person’s environment.

Furthermore, processes of observation in developmental research were often unidirectional. The third-order effects were hardly considered in understanding the

interactions between the two-person system. For example, considering how the interaction between a mother and child is influenced by their larger family context or the presence of other siblings. The two-person system was treated in isolation from the social context within which it exists. Thus, his propositions on human development considered the developing individual's context and processes within that context. In his 1979 book, Bronfenbrenner provided the following definition of the ecology of humans:

> The ecology of human development involves the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded (1979b, p. 21).

In later years, from the 80s to 2006, Bronfenbrenner's theory evolved from an ecological to a bioecological theory (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). In their publication, Rosa and Tugde (2013) provide a comprehensive review and description of the evolution of the theory in all phases. Phase 1 (1973-1979) focused on the initial conceptualisation of the theory and its main propositions and was driven by limitations of developmental theories of the time and policies. Phase 2 (1980-1993) of the theoretical development focused on the interaction of the individual with their context (Person-Process-Context vs Process-Person-Context-Time) and time factors.

Furthermore, the developing person's characteristics were explicated concerning the role they play in the person's own developmental process. In phase 3 (1993-2006), the theory evolved from ecology to bioecology and focused on proximal processes (defined in the Person Process-Context Time model below). In another publication, Tudge et al. (2009) evaluated the application of the bioecological theory, arguing for the appropriate application

of the theory or the explicit descriptions of partial uses of the theory. In their view, it is important for researchers to indicate which version(s) of the theory they apply in research to avoid conceptual confusion or the deficient testing of the theory. In addition, Eriksson et al. (2018) reviewed studies in public mental health to examine how the ecological theory was applied and how the different phases of the theory are useful for guiding mental health policy and practice.

During this latter phase of Bronfenbrenner's theory, the emphasis was on "…the processes and conditions that govern the life-long course of human development in the actual environments in which human beings live" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Thus, the applicability of the ecological systems theory in understanding the developmental outcomes of ACE in women who have transitioned into motherhood. This theory allows us to understand the context (political, cultural, gendered, etc.) within which human development occurs and processes facilitating or hampering this development. Below is a discussion of the nested systems.

Humans in Context: The Ecological Systems

Within the ecological environment exists a set of nested systems termed the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. Popular depictions of the nested systems show separate layers of contexts outside of the individual with the individual at the centre. However, researchers recently argued that the simplistic depictions reduce the theory to merely that of context and omit the synergistic nature of the theory (Navarro et al., 2022).

The Microsystem

The microsystem comprises interactions within the developing individual's immediate setting. A dyad is a critical context of development and a foundation of the microsystem

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979b). By Bronfenbrenner's definition, a dyad occurs "whenever two persons pay attention to or pay to participate in one another's activities" (1979, pg. 56.). In the microsystem, reciprocity is recognised as a core element in interactions between the researcher and participant (or subject), or the developing person and another party within their immediate setting (i.e., home, school, work). This is considered the upper layer of the developing child's ecology and the most visible (Bronfenbrenner, 1974). It is within the microsystem that the argument of traditional observations of two-person systems and the proposition of reciprocity are framed. In the microsystem involves interactions where a person engages with others and "the subjective meanings assigned to those interactions" (Heise, 1998, p. 269).

In contrast to earlier models, Bronfenbrenner's proposed that ecological experiments must allow observations of how, for example, a mother's behaviour affects that of a child and visa-versa. Furthermore, research in the ecological model recognises other role players within the setting and moves beyond just the two-person system and considers second-order effects. The second-order effect involves observations of how a third party indirectly influences the interaction between two people in a dyad (Bronfenbrenner, 1979b). The microsystem involves the direct and indirect interactions between family members, involving the child and the child's perception of this environment (Sidebotham, 2001). The family is the closest system with or in which a child interacts, and it is also the most common system in which abuse occurs.

It is important to note the proximal processes emphasised in the reformed 'bioecological model' are the main drivers of development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). The proximal process refers to interactions between the developing person and the people, objects, and symbols in their immediate environment. Thus, this accentuates the role of the microsystem in human development. These processes

have the potential to produce developmental competence or dysfunction. An example of research focusing on the microsystem concerning ACEs is a study by Holtzhausen-Campbell (2021) testing the universality of ACE as risk factors for the development of antisocial behaviour in a South African adult population. The study considered individual risk factors in the individual's characteristics and factors in their microsystem which contribute to the development of antisocial behaviour. The study found associations between exposure to childhood abuse (and neglect) and anti-social behavioural outcomes in adolescence.

The Mesosystem

The mesosystem encompasses the interconnection between systems containing the developing person. Although the family is seen as the context in which human development primarily occurs, it is only one of the settings in which developmental processes occur (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). In the case of a child, the different settings may include the interrelation between family setting, school, and church. The mesosystem acknowledges that one system may affect a person's behaviour or development in another system. A child's interaction at home with parents may affect their interactions with peers or teachers at school. Likewise, a parent's interactions at work may influence their behaviour within the home. For example, a stressful work environment can affect a parent's mood and the home environment. Furthermore, the mesosystem encompasses the ecological transitions, such as motherhood, and how these transitions shape human development. Research on childhood and adversity using the mesosystem as a model can investigate the effects of events in one setting on the child's functioning in another (Dawes & Donald, 1994).

The Exosystem

The exosystem is connected to the mesosystem and includes other social structures that do not contain the developing person but influence the settings containing the developing person. In the case of a child, this may include a parent's workplace, the community or neighbourhood, and government institutions. In the South African context, changes in the neighbourhood, such as forced removals of Black people from their homes to homesteads by the apartheid government, can provide nuances of child development. Bronfenbrenner (1977) proposed that research should look beyond the immediate setting containing the developing person and investigate how broader contexts affect the immediate setting. Therefore, the exosystem models look at the settings in which the child does not spend time in or which they seldom enter, such as settings where their parents interact (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

Research on childhood and adversity using the exosystem as a model examines the influence of events that occur in settings that the child does not occupy but are occupied by other family members. One such study conducted in South Africa is by Holtzhausen-Campbell's (2021), who explicitly focused on the micro and exosystem to understand adverse childhood experiences as risk factors for young adults developing anti-social behaviour. The study examined the role of individual and neighbourhood or community factors in developmental outcomes.

Macrosystem

The macrosystem refers to the broader structures and ideological patterns of culture or sub-culture (i.e., socioeconomic, educational, legal, and political systems) that influence the developing person (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Though not referring to a specific context, these broader structures, such as legislation and policies, influence the context in which the person interacts. Interestingly, Bronfenbrenner’s work between 1973 and 1979 was influenced by the

political interest in social policies related to children, adolescents, and families (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Contrary to the notion that policy should be influenced or based on science, Bronfenbrenner argued that science needs social policy (Bronfenbrenner, 1974).

Chronosystem

The chronosystem considers time factors in understanding consistencies and/or changes in the developing person's characteristics or their environment. From 1986 to 2006, Bronfenbrenner emphasised the role of the chronosystem and the role of historical time in human development (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Life transitions (normative and non-normative) are seen as the simplest forms exemplifying the chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). This level considers environmental events and transmissions over the life course and across sociohistorical circumstances (Nsamenang, 2015). Non-normative events such as sexual abuse will have various effects on children and their psychological characteristics during their life course (Dawes & Donald, 1994). Comparison studies of intergenerational trauma and legacies of collective trauma often observe the outcomes of the trauma on different cohorts (generation 1 and generation 2) and can exemplify research approached from the chronosystem. For example, a study in South Africa investigated the salience of intergenerational trauma amongst descendants of victims of apartheid-era gross human rights violations (Adonis, 2016).

Although conceptually framed through the life-course perspective and historical trauma theory, the study highlights the impact of historical time by exploring transgenerational transmissions of trauma in post-apartheid South Africa focusing on children and grandchildren of victims of Apartheid gross human rights violations. This signifies the crucial role of time and historical context in understanding psychological phenomena.

The Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) Model

Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) describe the evolving bioecological model of human development. The ecological systems theory considered the influence of the social environment on human development; however, factors within the developing person were not focused on. In later years, through the development of the bioecological model, Bronfenbrenner considered individual and time factors, further developing the Process Person Context (PPCT) Model. The four defining concepts of the PPCT model are in its name: process, person, context, and time. Process refers specifically to proximal process, which refers to certain forms of interaction between organisms and their environment. In addition, person characteristics are considered, which include disposition, bioecological resources (i.e., ability, experience, knowledge), and demand. Thus, through the concept of proximal processes, Bronfenbrenner emphasised the person's role in their own development (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Context encompasses the nested systems (micro, meso, macro, exo, and chronosystem) discussed earlier, which outline the environment of the developing individual. The dimension of Time expounded on the Chronosystem to include ontogenetic and historical time (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Three levels of time are described: micro (continuity vs discontinuity in proximal processes), meso (its periodicity over time), and macro (changes in the larger society over time) (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). This model allowed for a greater understanding of non-normative processes such as childhood adversity (i.e., abuse and neglect) and their developmental effects over the life course of the “adult-child”.

Theoretical Relevance

Although Bronfenbrenner developed his theory to understand human development in context, the theory has been widely applied in various fields, including health research (Eriksson et al., 2018). Similarly, the ecological model has also been used to understand different disciplines and contexts, including childhood adversities (Belsky, 1980;

Holtzhausen-Campbell, 2021; Newton, 2019; Sidebotham, 2001), women abuse (Heise, 1998), and family studies (Fivush & Merrill, 2016). The ecological perspective is acclaimed as the most comprehensive paradigm for understanding child abuse (Sidebotham, 2001). One of the reasons is that the model allows an exploration of how particular cultural, environmental, and other interactive factors lead to child abuse (and other traumas) and various outcomes in later life (Sidebotham, 2001). Childhood adversities can occur within the family system or in other systems where the child functions or where they do not directly interact but are indirectly affected by other contexts.

However, as mentioned earlier, scholars have criticised the use or misuse of the ecological/bioecological theory, arguing that it has been used in ways the theorists never intended (Eriksson et al., 2018; Tudge et al., 2009). The main criticism is the use of the interconnected layers of the system contributing to certain phenomena or outcomes, with no further analysis of the interactions between these systems (context) and the individual. I, therefore, applied both the contextual lenses and the proximal processes in this inquiry to illuminate the factors shaping motherhood. The focal point of this study is the PPCT model in line with the research questions, with the understanding that the nested systems foreground the context and are essential in understanding mental health risk factors. I use the PPCT to interpret the interaction between the participating women's personal characteristics within the context and transitions over time. However, I acknowledge that the time factor in this model is more suitable for longitudinal observations, which I did not fully explore in this study. I therefore relied on the retrospective accounts weaved in the participants' narratives.

In motherhood literature, feminist scholars have challenged the "public/private dichotomy" categorising research on gender and family life, which places motherhood in the isolated context of the family (O'Reilly, 2010). They argue for understandings of motherhood that go beyond the family context and consider other social institutions. The ecological theory

allowed for this analysis of motherhood in a multiple-layered context. Through the concepts of Bronfenbrenner's theory, I could view ACE in context and understand the dynamics of motherhood as an institution and practice. Trauma (i.e., childhood abuse, gendered trauma) is a complex phenomenon that requires an analysis of multiple factors and systems that influence its occurrence.

Likewise, motherhood as a developmental and transitional stage involves an understanding of the mothers within their context while considering individual factors that shape mothering. I used the concepts of the ecological systems and the interactions within and between these systems to investigate the factors that lead to ACE and shaped motherhood in the women's adult life. Individual factors were also considered using the later concepts of Bronfenbrenner's more developed model. The ecological systems theory purports that human development occurs in various interconnected systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979a). Furthermore, the ecological framework emphasises the interconnectedness of multiple factors in the aetiology of abuse (Heise, 1998).

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the theoretical framework underpinning this study. Bronfenbrenner's theory was initially termed the ecological systems theory, focusing on the environmental influences on human development, and later evolved to the ecological model, which focused on proximal processes and the individual's role in their own development. This chapter thus discussed the evolution of the theory. The chapter provides a detailed overview of these theories and their application to understanding developmental outcomes in women transitioning into motherhood. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory has been applied in various fields such as health research, childhood adversities, women abuse, and family studies. It is considered a comprehensive paradigm for understanding child abuse as it explores how cultural, environmental, and interactive factors contribute to outcomes.

Feminist scholars challenge the isolated view of motherhood within the family and advocate for considering other social institutions. Trauma and motherhood are complex phenomena that require analysing multiple factors and systems. The ecological theory helps examine ACE and the dynamics of motherhood within various interconnected systems.

Chapter 4: Research Design and Methods

Introduction

This study investigated how childhood adversities interact with contextual factors to shape Black women's experiences of motherhood. The study also aimed to understand women's mental protective and risk factors for mental health distress. In this chapter, I take the reader through the tools I employed to reach the objectives of this study and to determine rigour. This chapter details how I conducted the study, including the chosen approach, research design, how the participants were selected, the data and analysis, how rigour was ensured, the ethical considerations.

Qualitative Inquiry

This study used qualitative research approach and a case study design. Qualitative research methods, also referred to as qualitative inquiry, were undertaken to understand the mothering experiences of women exposed to adversities in their childhood. Denzin and Lincoln (2018. pg 43) define qualitative research as "a situated activity that locates the observer in the world." This highlights the important role of subjectivity in this type of research and that knowledge is not value free. Meaning that the inquiry is value-bound by the researcher's perspective (Gray, 2014). My inquiry provided a contextual understanding of the experiences of Black mothers and the meaning they ascribe to motherhood. The choice of qualitative research was guided by the desire to provide a deep and nuanced understanding of the reality of Black mothers without pathologizing Black women. This was done by telling the women's stories from their perspectives while acknowledging how my perspectives and biases influenced the study. The qualitative approach created space for Black women to contribute their taken-for-granted experiences and knowledge on mental health (Spates, 2012). The key features of qualitative research include collecting data from natural settings,

the key role of the researcher, the multiple methods (data), and complex inductive-deductive logic (Creswell, 2013). In line with the case study design was appropriate as it also deals with the induvial case in its real or natural context (Bromley, 1986).

Case Study Design

Case studies are useful for 'how' and 'why' questions that aim to describe, explain, explore, and understand a phenomenon or social system (Schoch, 2020; Swanborn, 2010; Yin, 2011). A Case Study is here defined as an empirical inquiry about a bounded phenomenon, within its real-life context (Yin, 2011). Cases can refer to various things in different disciplines. Within psychology, I refer to Bromley's (1986, ix) definition of case studies as "the study of an individual person, usually in a problematic situation, over a relatively short period of time."

Through the individual cases, I addressed the explanatory question of how mothers with a history of ACE position themselves in their adult lives. The study focused on how ACE shape or impact the adult-child and their experiences and perceptions of motherhood. The case study design allowed for rich descriptions of and explanations of the realities of women navigating motherhood in the context of previous trauma. An important assumption of case study research is that examining the context and other conditions is fundamental to understanding the case. For example, in psychology, the context of an individual can explain the individual's behaviour or condition. The collective "cases" I studied are women who experienced childhood adversities in their earlier lives and are now mothers. These cases were time-bound in that the women were born between 1980-1990 during the apartheid dispensation in South Africa.

Furthermore, the case units being studied can be located at multiple levels; the macro level (people, and interpersonal relations), the meso level (organisational, institutional) and

the macro level (large communities) (Swanborn, 2010). This description is aligned with the nested systems in the ecological systems in how the person or case is positioned concerning other entities in the social system. The multiple units of analysis in this study derived from the three conditions Yin (2012) outlines, namely, conditions over time (childhood during the 90s to motherhood), in-depth inquiry, and contextual conditions (the individual's family, economic status, work, etc.). The contextual conditions include childhood experiences, adversity/traumatic experiences, motherhood, and maternal mental health. The contextual conditions of each case in the study are presented in the case descriptions in Chapter 5. In case studies, Yin (2012) asserts that the number of units of interest may exceed the number of data points presented by the individual cases.

Social Constructionism

I used the social constructionism as a paradigm guiding my epistemological and ontological stance in approaching this study. This paradigm is heralded as a useful framework for understanding mothering and motherhood particularly for considering interactions, interpretative processes, social context, and relationship (Arendell, 2000). Motherhood is often viewed as a simplistic role and natural phenomenon. However, ideologies of motherhood and of women carers are enshrined in culture, religion, and marriage as an institution. Primitive experiences of women shape their reality of motherhood; however, these taken-for-granted experiences are also context-specific. Motherhood is not a static or once-off event occurring at childbirth. Still, it is a social, interactionist, and continuous process.

Social constructionism is a favourable paradigm because it locates people's reality and meaning- making in social interactions and focuses on investigating social influences on both communal and individual life (Owen, 1995). It also questions the essentialist views of the world and phenomena such as motherhood. Knowledge is understood to be sustained by

social processes and is associated with social action (Burr, 1995) and the performance of self (Gergen, 2011). Thus, as Gergen (2011b.p. 645) profoundly states, “if what we call knowledge emerges from the social process, then social process stands as an ontological prior to the individual”. I draw parallels between the fundamentals of the social constructionist paradigm and Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory in that both focus on our social context and its influence on human development or experience.

The social constructionist paradigm supports alternative views of human development and emphasises the relational self without devaluing biological perspectives. In addition, psychological case studies are “a reconstruction and interpretation of a significant episode in a person’s life (Bromley 1977, cited in Bromley, 1986, p. 3). Social constructionism allowed me to take a critical stance in understanding adverse childhood experiences and how women construct motherhood in line with these primitive experiences. This critical stance also considered the role of culture and the historical and sociopolitical context of the participants and moved away from dominant conceptions of trauma and perspectives of motherhood.

Participants

Eight women participated in this study through semi-structured interviews and reflection documents. This relatively small sample reflects the difficulty in locating women who experienced ACE and were willing to speak about their experiences. I set out to interview 10 women who had experienced a form of adversity during their childhood and are now mothers. In the research plan I had set out to purposefully select a minimum of 10 participants though with the intent of sampling to saturation. Code saturation was reached in the analysis stage and no further interviews were conducted.

Sixteen women showed interest in the study, but only eight women were willing to let me into their world and reopen a chapter of traumatic memories. As is common with most

qualitative research designs, the sample size in case study research is typically small (Schoch, 2020). The women ranged between the age 30 and 45, born between the years 1980 and 1990. Table 1 summarises the participants' biographical information and pseudonyms were used to conceal the women's identities.

Table 1

Participant information

Name (Pseudonym)	**Age between**	**Residence**	**Adverse Childhood Experience**
Fezile	30-40	Pretoria, Gauteng	Child abuse, witnessing the abuse of a parent, violence within the home/community, neglect, or emotional abuse by adults in the home.
Moloko	30-40	Pretoria, Gauteng	Child abuse, witnessing the abuse of a parent, violence within the home/community, neglect, or emotional abuse by adults in the home.
Sibongile	30-40	Pretoria, Gauteng	Witnessing the abuse of a parent, neglect, or emotional abuse by adults in the home.
Hope	30-40	Pretoria, Gauteng	Witnessing the abuse of a parent.

Matsie	30-40	Pretoria, Gauteng	Witnessing violence within the home or community.
Hunadi	30-40	Pretoria, Gauteng	Child abuse, witnessing the abuse of a parent.
Khanyi	Above 40 yrs.	Soweto, Gauteng	Child abuse, witnessing the abuse of a parent, violence within the home/community, neglect, or emotional abuse by adults in the home.
Boitumelo	30-40	Polokwane, Limpopo	Child abuse (physical, sexual or maltreatment)

Note: the table is my own work compiled from the recruitment from. Pseudonyms were assigned.

The years in which the women were born were significant to the study given the historical context either before the 1994 democratic dispensation or the immediate years post-apartheid. During the 80s, the then government of South Africa was under increasing internal pressure concerning the apartheid regime, which led to decisions that triggered mass civil society protests and retaliation from the government (South African History Online, 2023). This means that the women would have been born during apartheid and later became mothers in post-apartheid South Africa. The study explored how contextual factors, including historical factors, influence women's experiences of motherhood. The women were selected from Limpopo and Gauteng province as these are areas I have personal connections to and could access participants.

Gauteng province is the smallest but highly populated province (states) in South Africa, in the highveld region of South Africa. Limpopo province is the northernmost part of South Africa and is situated close to the borders of Botswana, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique. These two areas were purposefully selected, and various recruitment sources were used mainly online and word of mouth. The criteria included participants from any socioeconomic background (i.e., education, income, and occupation) however they needed to have basic writing literacy since one of the data collection methods included writing a reflection. The participants experienced various childhood adversities, including child abuse (sexual, physical, maltreatment), witnessing violence in the home (i.e., a violent father), and neglect or emotional abuse by adults in the home. Women indicated their interest in the study by completing an online recruitment form which collected their contact details, location, and form of ACE.

Gathering the Data

In qualitative research and case study design, data are often collected from multiple forms of data (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2011). I employed three sources of data collection, reflections (either written or voice recorded), semi-structured interviews and field notes I compiled after every interview. On one level, I explored childhood stories to locate the traumatic memories and adversities the women experienced. On another level, I explored constructions of motherhood concerning these childhood traumas. On the third level, I explored other factors that intersect with and inform mothering and maternal mental health. The semi-structured interviews illuminated stories of childhood; the trauma experienced as well as transitions into motherhood.

This form of interviewing is suitable when studying people's perceptions and opinions, as well as complex or emotionally sensitive subjects (Kallio et al., 2016). An interview guide (see Appendix B) was developed with a few questions to guide the interview

to focus the conversation on issues I considered necessary concerning the study's objectives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The interview began with an invitation for participants to tell me about their childhood and origins. The context or subject of one's origins was critical against the backdrop of rural migration in South Africa due to urbanisation vs industrialisation. African people in the cities often have roots in rural life and experience complex adaptational lifestyles (Manganyi, 1973). Five of the eight interviews were conducted face-to-face in a safe place convenient to the participants. Three interviews were conducted virtually using the Microsoft Teams application for logistical reasons. With the participants' consent, all the interviews were audio- or video- recorded for analysis and interpretation. The written reflections highlighted childhood memories and personal meanings of motherhood. Participants received three prompting questions to guide their written reflections (See Appendix B). This assisted in some cases where participants were reflective, and sometimes the questions constrained the participants to merely provide answers to the questions rather than a reflection. After every interview, I made notes of what I observed during the interviews and reflected on my experience.

Data Management and Analysis

Data analysis in case study research is not prescriptive and may take different forms (Yin, 2012). In analysing the data, I followed a series of steps and phases guided by the analytical framework by Braun et al. (2006) and Braun and Clarke (2019) and other techniques related to case study research (Schoch, 2020; Yin, 2011). In qualitative research, the data analysis process is often cyclical and not linear. Although I followed Braun and Clarke's stages of Thematic Analysis, the analytical process was iterative and did not follow a linear order. I familiarised myself with the data by listening to the recorded interviews and transcribing some interviews myself. I employed a transcriber to assist with the

transcriptions, and I quality assured the written transcripts against the audio. This allowed me to proofread while also making notes of interesting parts and developing a code list.

I employed a co-coder who used Atlas ti software to code the data. Using the software assisted with sorting and organising the data (Nowell et al., 2017) while examining relationships and developing graphic representations (Lu & Shulman, 2008). The coder identified interesting sections of the text which formed the basis of my themes. Although the study was underpinned by the ecological systems theory, the coding was deductive while guided by the research question. The themes were then reviewed, and the final themes were developed. Naming and defining the themes involved a creative process of meaning-making.

Reflexive Thematic Analysis (TA) (Braun & Clarke, 2021) allowed me to look at patterns within and across the women's narratives of their lives as mothers while considering my role in the analytic process. Reflexive TA identifies that developing themes requires the researcher to do extensive analytic and interpretive work (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This analytic method was appropriate and fit for this study because of its flexibility, although it is constrained by paradigmatic and epistemological assumptions underpinning the study (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The descriptions of each case, as well as the findings from the analysis, are provided in Chapters Five to 12 as individual case reports. Chapter 13 will present the interpretation and thematic analysis across the cases (comparative analysis). All direct quotations from the data will be presented in block quotations regardless of the length of the extract. Although there is no standard format for psychological case studies (Bromley, 1986), I follow a standard structure in reporting the findings of multiple cases by giving themes for each case followed by a comparative analysis of the cases.

Ensuring Trustworthiness

Measures of trustworthiness are important in qualitative research to ensure rigour. Based on constructs introduced by Guba (cited in Shenton, 2004), the following measures of trustworthiness will be discussed here; credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The provisions given in terms of each measure of trustworthiness are derived (adapted) from Shenton (2004). Credibility refers to how the researcher attempts to present an accurate picture of the phenomenon under scrutiny (Shenton, 2004). According to Yin (2011), one of the notorieties of case study research is the lack of trust in the credibility of research procedures. Qualitative researchers use the term credibility the way quantitative researchers use internal validity. As such research methods adopted and outlined in this chapter are well-established in qualitative research. Participants were provided with a reflection guide and an information sheet before creating rapport and allowing familiarity with the research study. Using the hybrid data collection and sampling methods (discussed above) are a form of triangulation. The collective case design is employed, which provided various voices on the same phenomena. The semi-structured interviews allowed for probing and 'iterative questioning.' In cases where falsification is identified, the interview data will be discarded from the analysis. Thick descriptions of the phenomenon are in the descriptive analysis and the interpretation and discussion chapters.

Transferability refers to the study's generalisability or external validity (as in quantitative research), which is the extent to which the findings can be transferred to other settings. To help with transferability a clear and distinct description of the research context, selection and characteristics of participants is provided, as well as data collection and process of analysis (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). As indicated, rich descriptions are provided with quotations from the data to enhance transferability.

Regarding the measure of dependability, the processes followed in this study are detailed in the report. Reporting on the process enables future researchers to replicate the study and possibly gain similar results (Shenton, 2004). Qualitative data collection and analysis are, in principle, also associated with the researcher's personality (Verschuren, 2003).

Furthermore, qualitative researchers cannot be objective, but confirmability is essential to reduce bias. Therefore, triangulation and quotations from the data were used to reduce bias and subjectivity. Furthermore, reflexivity was ensured by recording my personal biases, values, and background shaped shape their interpretations formed during a study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). These are outlined in my positionality statement later in this chapter. The choice of a multiple-case design can allow for confidence in the study's findings (Yin, 2011). The detailed descriptions in case study research allow other researchers and practitioners to apply the knowledge or lessons learned to other cases, which leads to transferability (Schoch, 2020).

Reflexivity: My Positionality

Creswell (2013) elaborates on the definition of qualitative research and maintains that this type of research "involves close attention to the interpretive nature of inquiry and situating the study within the political, social, and cultural context of the researcher, and the reflexivity or "presence" of the researcher in the accounts they present" (p. 45). Furthermore, research is an interactive process shaped by one's personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and those of the people in that context, including the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). I, therefore, acknowledge my positionality in the research and what informed my inquiry as well as my interpretation of the stories of mothers in the study.

My positionality as a Black female researcher familiar with the realities of Black women from observation and some experience undoubtedly shaped the tone of my interpretation of the data. Although I did not experience interpersonal trauma as a child, my childhood in the political context of South Africa during the 90s bears similarities to that of the participants in the study. My interest in the questions in the study was informed by observations of complex mothering within my family and community and the role that women play in these contexts. Therefore, I considered myself an insider in terms of the experience of "being Black", not being a mother at the time of the study positioned me as an outsider. This insider-outsider paradoxical position allowed me to enter the participants' world as a fellow Black woman and not as an expert.

During my earlier studies in psychology, I observed a complex mother-daughter relationship within my family, which led me to an interest in childhood trauma and questions on how these inform motherhood as a role with rights and duties. I began to consider the role of political context and history in domestic experiences within Black African households. Therefore, my interest in this study is informed by personal experiences and the desire to contribute knowledge on the psychology of my people and the multiplicity of Black women's realities. These perspectives informed my analysis and interpretation of the data collected from the semi-structured interviews and personal reflections. However, I adhered to the positioning and conceptualisation of the role of the researcher in case study research (Willig, 2013). The researcher is described as a witness or reporter who observes events and reports accurately (Willig, 2013). I have thus attempted to provide accurate details of the cases and provided interpretations supported by evidence from the transcripts.

Ethical Consideration

Before collecting data, ethical approval was requested and obtained from the university's College Research Ethics Committee (CREC). Due to the challenges, I experienced with recruiting participants I returned to the ethics committee to request an amendment to my initial research protocol. In the initial proposal, I had set out to interview women from Pretoria however the setting was amended to cast the net wider and allow virtual interviews.

Voluntary participation was stressed in the recruitment, and participants consented to be contacted for the study via the recruitment link. Participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any point before the data analysis. An information sheet and consent forms were provided to the participants before data collection. Confidentiality was ensured by not disclosing personal identifiers in the write-up and anonymising data. However, I could not guarantee confidentiality for the two online interviews as I did not have control over the participants' settings. Participants were advised to be in a safe secluded environment for the interviews.

Pseudonyms were used in the case descriptions and thematic analysis. The research topic was sensitive and emotive, and a clinical psychologist was available for participants, although none used these services. However, a crucial benefit of the study was that it provided a non-therapeutic but safe space for mothers who experienced adversities in their childhood. The knowledge derived from the study benefits the South African society and professionals offering interventions. The study also advances knowledge on the experiences of a population often marginalised in mental health care and discourses of historical trauma.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the method which was followed to reach the objectives of this study. I discussed the research approach, research design, participant selection, data collection, data analysis, ensuring rigour, ethical considerations, and my role as the researcher. In this chapter I also provided reasons why specific steps were taken and some decisions made in the methodology. In the next chapters I will introduce each participant's case, giving demographic information and the nature of their trauma. I will then present their stories by way of themes developed from each narrative in line with the aim of this study. In my presentation of the themes, I also attempt to take into account the time dimension of the participants' suffering and the emotional reactions they exhibit and those within their narrative (Bromley, 1986).

Chapter 5: Fezile's Story: A Struggle for Belonging

Introduction

Fezile is a 32-year-old Xhosa mother of two children. She is a highly educated woman and works for a high education institution. She is the first child of four siblings. Her parents got divorced when she was a university student. Her trauma relates to neglect, maltreatment, and sexual molestation, and grief. Her story begins with her migration with her aunt to Zambia, where she spent much of her childhood. Born in 1991 in South Africa, her parents were too young to raise her, which led to her being cared for by her paternal aunt and moving away from South Africa. She lived in two foster homes and experienced sexual abuse at the hands of a relative in her second foster home. Fezile was reunited with her family in South Africa in her teens. Upon her return, her parents had built a life and a family, which she needed to adapt and assimilate into. Her relationship with her mother had been strained due to their separation, which influenced her attachment style.

Primary Analytical Themes

Upbringing: Stability vs Instability

Fezile narrates a history of stability versus instability during her childhood. She moved between countries and between homes where she lived, sometimes with family and sometimes with non-relatives from the community. This theme, concerning instability, is characterised by unstable movements during childhood, resource sharing within the household, complex family structures, and the loss of a family member. Fezile experienced a drastic change when she moved to a different country to live with her aunt because her parents were young when they had her. This would be the beginning of many such movements characterised by stability and instability. As a child, her changes in living arrangements were decided by adults in her life in the search for stability, although this also

led to instability and exposure to adversity. She described these moves as having been other people's options and not hers, which indicates that the changes were not discussed with her as a child. It further illustrates her lack of agency as a child.

> *Not because it was really my option. When I was born, my parents were very young, so my aunt took me.*

Because her aunt was a nun in training, Fezile was displaced and left in the care of a foster guardian who gave her a mother's love and a stable home environment. She describes how she came about living with her first foster family and her relationship with her foster mother.

> *…but however, there are people in the church who have said that if ever there's a child, give them the child. And so that's how I went to my first foster home.*
>
> *Yes, so I was staying with those people, and they were just amazing. The woman was like "you can call me mom" you know, and I remember I shared a bed with her. She also was taking care of her late sister's child, and that girl was about two years older than me.*

How Fezile speaks about her foster mother and initial living conditions signal a time of stability for her and a time when she experienced love. Although the foster mother treated Fezile like her own child, she was aware that the woman was not her biological mother, which signals her level of consciousness as a child. As she explains in the following excerpt, the church environment was also a place of stability and belonging.

> *So, I was like, okay, it's fine. But at church, it was no problem, I made friends with the local kids, you know, and…and then, but I knew that this lady wasn't my mom. Not because of the way she treated me, she treated me…where no*

one could have known that she's not my mom. She treated me very well. However, her daughter, she had an older daughter, and whenever there would be reports on, on like the news about people coming from the war. You know like, I don't know if you've ever seen on the news where they are like showing Sudanese in a line.

[…] Yes, like in a refugee camp. And then, like she would call me. She'd be like, "come, come, come, where's your family here".

There was stability and care in the household, although hostility was evident from her foster sister. However, when her foster mother passed on, her life took a turn into instability and maltreatment.

...[sniffs] and any way ahh [crying] so then life carried on, you know. But then the daughter now started giving me a hard time, you know, like she'd…if we like wanted to play [crying inaudible], and then she'd be like mmm [refusing], "you guys do chores."

In the below quote she describes her report to the nun convent and her foster sister's-imposed living arrangement. Although she had long experienced hostility from her foster sister, their mother's passing left her vulnerable to abuse. Due to the hostile treatment and neglect, Fezile was placed in a different foster home.

Ja, because this was my mother's arrangement, this wasn't my arrangement. So, they never took her seriously. But now when I'd go, I'd cry and say, "But she didn't buy me this, she didn't buy me clothes…you know, she's insulting us", you know, and then they…they took me out…and they put me in another foster home.

Fezile experienced maltreatment and abuse in this second foster home. It is important to note that foster care in this context was not a formalized process but a private arrangement between relatives and also between the church and families in the church. It included relatives taking care of children without the involvement of the state government or external funding. In this case, Fezile was not legally adopted by her aunt, and in the home where she was placed, there was another child who was also not legally adopted. So foster care has a different meaning in this context. The church offered an additional system of care through the nuns who made crucial decisions such as where she would live and her schooling; they also provided for her basic needs and created stability.

The abrupt announcement of her move back to South Africa shows the uncertainties she lived with, and the constant changes she had to adapt to.

> *Then the nun who was dropping me off at the school, it was maybe 100 kilometres away, the school, like from here to the Vaal. So, she came and she said, look, your father has sent for you, you are going to South Africa tomorrow. And I was like, just when I was about to go stick it to those rich kids now…but I was just like all I heard was South Africa [singing], you know. And he sent all my stuff, my papers, my…so the lady who came to get me to go is the lady who I originally stayed with when I moved to Malawi.*

She describes her father's return to her life as follows:

> *So, I went to boarding school uhm and that time now, just before I departed for school, my father made contact. He said he wants his daughter back. He's settled now. He now started working as a long-distance truck driver, and he sent proof like it's him.*

Fezile's childhood was characterised by times of stability and instability in three main phases in her story. In the first phase, her first guardian (her aunt) took care of her in an attempt to give her a stable childhood. However, the growing economic and political precarities led them to migration which did not favour Fezile and led to her displacement. In the second phase, she lived with a foster family and later loses her foster mother which a significant resulted in instability and a turn in her childhood. In the third phase, she moves back to South Africa, returning to her estranged family and forming new bonds.

Trauma Narrative: A struggle for belonging

Fezile's story highlighted experiences of child abuse, neglect, and witnessing violence in the home. She was taken by her aunt when she was a child because her parents were unable to care for her. However, she does not perceive her parent's decision as abandonment or neglect. This is important to understand how she constructs her narrative and makes sense of her life story. She does not speak about her parents when narrating her early childhood although she was aware that her family was in another country. She speaks more about her awareness of her father's existence than her mother.

> *I, you know, ahh…the first mom told me I don't know anything about your family, but let's just pretend they are not there, you know. I knew of my aunt. I knew of my father being in South Africa. I knew…like, I knew my father is in South Africa somewhere…but other than that, everything was a blur, you know, like…so hmm…I'm gonna get to the point.*

This could be related to what she was told in her family and her perception of her mother since she had moved to her paternal family. Her relationship with her parents was non-existent until she moved back to South Africa in her teenage years. Her trauma narrative begins after her foster mother passed on.

So, we'd go see her and…and then she died. And I remember we went; her funeral was a big deal because she was well-known and well-loved in the community, you know. And so, we uhm the funeral was a big deal like people came. It was more celebratory, you know. It was my second funeral, which I'd attended to, but that…for her, it was just weird that she was not coming back, you know, and… [long pause and crying] … sorry.

[sniffs] and any way ahh [crying] so then life carried on, you know. But then the daughter now started giving me a hard time, you know, like she'd…if we like wanted to play [crying inaudible], and then she'd be like mmm [refusing] "you guys do chores."

This was a pivotal point in her childhood and the trajectory of her life. After her first foster mother's passing, the abuse from her foster sister intensified. She speaks of her foster mother's death in passing and shows how she has silenced her own pain and carried on with life. Self-silencing can be a coping mechanism that one adopts in traumatic experiences, and it can be "the motivation of maintaining relationships and connection with others since these are at the core of women's self-concept" (Maji & Dixit, 2019, p. 6). Fezile admits that she had unresolved trauma from her mother's passing, which she became aware of during the interview:

[…] but I was like, I suppose there are certain issues which I may need to talk about. Like I didn't know that it hurt me that that woman died until this moment in time.

Children who experience traumatic grief from losing a parent may be unable to tolerate the remembrance of a loved one without excessively using avoidance, which leads to the inability to mourn appropriately (Kaplow et al., 2006). Fezile had not mourned her foster

mother's passing. The interview was a safe space for her to voice her repressed emotions. Perhaps, as a child, she did not have the language and space to communicate her suffering. However, in reclaiming her voice, she describes other moments of defiance and how they were meted with efforts to silence her:

> *You know, and she would prevent me from going to anything.*

In addition to the work, she was subjected to in her second foster home, she experienced sexual abuse from one of the males in this home. Her experience was invalidated, and the abuser was defended. However, the sexual advances dissipated after her act of defiance. She narrates how she reported her abuser and the response she received.

> *You know your… he'd touch me inappropriately. The one time I told her, and she was like, "Why would he touch you, why would he do that? We've had prettier girls living in this house, and they never had those issues". Then I said to her, "Where are they". So, my defiance started.*
>
> *When I left and, she was like, "Okay, this must stay between us, [mentions name] don't touch her again, okay, don't look at her". And when I told her it's because they had a visitor, they had someone who came to visit, and he was a very nice man, so I thought this one will listen to me. This one sees that I work all the time. So, in the middle of the night, I cried, I screamed, and then he now was like…now it was awkward.*

She speaks proudly of the incident where she left the home in defiance:

> *You see, so it was such a beating that…it was on a Saturday afternoon, I packed up my stuff. And I told them I said, "Ever since I've come to this house, I've been a slave…I AM LEAVING"*

> *So, you…there's certain things as a human being like okay, maybe my instincts just told me as a child to say…So I left. I packed my stuff [snaps], I told them, "I'm leaving." I walked, I think, a kilometre, they came after me. "No, we are sorry, it's true you do all the work in the house," this is the mom and the brother…*

Her defiance was a way of regaining her voice and exercising autonomy and agency. She was not completely powerless, although in the confounds of a protective environment and the fear of negative perceptions. Her defiance was always related to escaping toxic environments. In addition to the adversities Fezile experienced during her childhood, as a teenager, she witnessed her father's abuse towards her mother. However, it seems that her father's physical abuse was often related to how her mother treated her.

> *She did her […] degree, finished it, she was not job hunting until my father started beating her to say you must look for a job, you want to sleep the whole day, you know, and my father also would come home and I'm doing the chores.*
>
> *She was like, "I'm teaching her," and then my father was like, "How long are you gonna do this teaching of yours because clearly she can do the work and she's at school, when does she do her schoolwork", you know, "when does she do her schoolwork". And my father beat my mother. My mom packed up her staff took their other kids, like my other siblings…*

The quotes above show two instances where her father "disciplined" her mother in his daughter's defence. This could have affected already strained relationship with her mother. The family dynamics and the move to South Africa seem to have affected Fezile academically. She described herself as a high-achieving student although failed her grade 12

after returning to South Africa. Through the various phases of her story, an underlying narrative she highlighted was her struggle for belonging. In her writing, she reflects on what comes to her mind when she thinks of her childhood and stated the following:

> *I think of being unwanted, working hard for approval and acceptance and still not obtaining it. I think of not belonging and striving to belong [Reflection].*

Sometimes during the interview, she highlighted how the struggle of belonging and fitting in has followed her all her life. As an adult, this need for belonging has been observed and highlighted by her colleagues and the church community. This is one part of her life that she is aware is because of her childhood trauma.

Complex Living Arrangements and Collective Parenting

The responsibility of child-rearing within African communities extends beyond the mother and the immediate family. Fezile's narrative shows complex living arrangements characterised by foster care and collective parenting (although mainly collective mothering). Although she was born in a nuclear type of setting with both parents, her parents' marital and socioeconomic status affected their ability to care for her. This resulted in alternative living arrangements and her being mainly raised by her aunt, supported by other women within their religious community.

> *So, during that time, she left me with… I don't want to say relatives, maybe distant relatives. So, my dad is Rwandese, and my mom is Xhosa. So, my aunt is my father's side. So, then I think it was like maybe people from her hometown in Rwanda, I'm not sure. But those people had to leave, they had to leave Zambia, and they decided they were gonna go to Malawi because they thought they could make a better living.*

She lived in two foster homes connected to their local church. In both her foster homes, female figures took care of the household materially and cared for multiple children, rarely their own. In one home, she reported having a male figure although the primary caregiver was a woman. Her second foster caregiver was married, although the husband worked abroad, the second male figure in this house was an older child. However, women were her primary caregivers including the nun sisters. Her second foster home had its own complexities and family dynamics. She describes the dynamics in the following quote:

> *…they took me out…and they put me in another foster home. And now those now those people were even worse. The lady also…so people ask for kids neh, some people it's because they can't have, some people it's because they need a sibling for their kid, and some people it's because they need someone to do the chores in the house. So, with these guys, that was the issue.*

She adapted to this new living arrangement and the family culture.

> *And okay, I know the drill, chores must be done…look those cultures are so traditional that…at seven (years old) you know how to make pap…you know. The day you take a stool, and you stand by the sink, ahh, you've signed up yourself to be a dish washer.*
>
> *Ja, [laughter] so I, so because now I'm going to school in the afternoon…would I not do chores, would I not like…if she's got cake orders I start the cake, mixing the butter with the sugar until its white and then the eggs.*

Although she seems to have adapted to this living arrangement it invariably affected her academic and social lives. The schooling system was such that children took turns alternating between attending school in the morning or the afternoon. This was called "hot

seating". Her morning activities went beyond just "chores" and involved working before her afternoon classes. She describes her labour and treatment as slavery and a "Cinderella story." She was treated and punished differently compared to her guardian's biological daughter.

The nun sisters intervened by sending Fezile to a boarding school, which meant she would be with her foster family on holidays. This was another change in living arrangements she had to adjust to. Soon after this, she was reunited with her family in South Africa. This household was not without its complexities. When she returned home, her parents had two other children whom she did not know. One of her siblings lived with an extended family, and her father lived with them but was away at work as a truck driver. Other relatives also lived within her home at some point. What is consistent here is the varied living arrangements that Fezile encountered, as well as the role players (mainly caregivers) in the different contexts. Her living arrangements exposed her to varied socioeconomic conditions, maltreatment, and relationships.

Family Dynamics

Fezile's life story is characterised by complex family dynamics, especially during the later parts of her childhood in South Africa. Her life before moving to Zambia is a hidden memory as she begins her story by narrating her move and stories of where she spent much of her childhood. However, her life story as a teenager signals complex family dynamics in a family that she only knew and experienced at this stage. The relationship with her family was "strange" and "highly strained" from the onset, although she mainly speaks of the estranged relationship with her mother.

> *My siblings? My family is in [mentions name of the place] [laughs]. But it's a very strange relationship… highly strained, you know.*

It is not clear how she related with her siblings; however, her interactions with her parents indicate the type of relationship they had with her respectively. Her mother is positioned as a hostile competitor, while her father is positioned as an accepting father. Her parents had a strained relationship characterised by physical abuse. However, it is not clear if the physical abuse was evident before her return to the family. She perceived herself to be the reason for her parents' conflict.

> *And so, I moved in with my father, and obviously, I was like looking around to say, Oh. My father wanted to get me anything and everything he could get, and that pissed off my mother. "So, she's come now, [John], and you have money, and you want to do this…". And I was like, doesn't this woman know that I am her child, I'm in her house, I'm…and you know she's…things with my family its…it had also shaped me to be who I am.*

In addition to the conflict between her parents, the tension between her and her mother is also evident. The underlying factors in their strained relationship could be her feeling abandoned and the circumstances around her birth. However, this is worth exploring to understand their history from an attachment perspective. Fezile perceives her mother as a competitor or one in competition with her. The quotes below show the rivalry between them.

> *And I don't know the rationale of my mom, like a part of her maybe thought, oh she's gonna replace me. Like that's…that was the kind of thing. Then one day, something small became a big deal*
>
> *[…] but also, she…arg I don't know, I don't know if she doesn't have any good ideas of her own, but she just treats me like I'm smug. She sees me as someone who is smug. I'm on her side…*

And then she was like ja I know you just want to be with your daughter here alone maybe you are in love with her. My mother said that.

The competition and forms of jealousy between them may have stemmed from unresolved issues from their past, resulting in their hostility towards each other. Fezile felt she would never please her mother, which relates to her mother's acceptance of her.

So, so anyways, the animosity between me and her was no matter what I did, I knew I'm never gonna please this woman. And also she would also go out of her way to spite me.

In addition to this estranged mother-daughter relationship, the relations between her and her siblings had interferences. It seems that there was no animosity between the siblings, although their mother interfered in the relations and continues to do so.

Yes, she would have been fine with it because how do I show up with twist, and you don't ask me where I got the money to do the twist from. You see, maybe I have a new blouse, and you want to wear that blouse, my blouse, to work, and you don't ask where did she get it from. She did have those expectations of me, and she's been having those expectations of my younger sister. I took her in, and then my mom poisoned our relationship…

Fezile and her mother's relationship remains strained even in her adulthood, which impacts her decisions as a mother, as she explains below.

But she always looks for a reason; right now, she's not talking to me because apparently there's something I said last year, and I find freedom in that. I think my things work better when I'm not talking to her. It's good. So, I…when she didn't talk to me, I had to obviously figure out the whole pregnancy thing,

but I'm not dumb, you know. I found baby centre, resources, asked friends, you know, uhm…

The relational dynamics within Fezile's family were complex, showing disruptions between the parental dyad, between the mother-daughter dyad, and between the siblings. Their parent's marriage ended in a divorce, which was attributed to extramarital relations.

Construction of Maternal Identity

Maternal identity relates to the woman's sense of self and how she constructed her identity as a mother. However, it also relates to what she associates with motherhood or what being a mother should be. Fezile's perception of herself as a mother was informed by her childhood and relationship with her mother. Although ideas of "real" motherhood existed in her before she became a mother, her maternal identity developed when she was pregnant. She did not have a maternal figure to learn from; however, she educated herself and relied on other resources, such as women with children. Her comment below suggests an internal need for her mother's presence during her pregnancy.

So, I when she [my mother] didn't talk to me, I had to obviously figure out the whole pregnancy thing, but I'm not dumb, you know. I found baby centre, resources, asked friends, you know, uhm…

After childbirth, a woman's life instantly becomes about the child, and her identity is reconstructed. Fezile expresses a realisation that women are invisible objects in society. Transitioning to motherhood is seen to make women invisible while centring the child. Womanhood is perceived as synonymous with motherhood and the role of women as child bearers.

I think as a woman, as you grow older, you realise that…it's not about you. In society, you are just some kind of object.

... now remember, he's my son, but he is not my son, he belongs to the community, you know. The first two months of my son's life, I barely had time with him, people always visited.

The feelings of objectification can be her internalized feelings of neglect and her constant need for belonging. However, in addition to the societal expectations of a woman's transition to motherhood, she carries an idealised view of what a "real mother" should be like, which relates to intensive mothering. She makes the following distinction between "a real mom" and "a foolish mom":

I think a real mom is…look, I won't…if my kids were sick, I would take care of them, I would be there for them but if it's terminal illness, I would get a nurse so that I can come to work because I still need the money. So, there's a mom, mom, and then there's a foolish mom. So, I love my kids, but I don't love them stupidly, you see [laughter]

This suggests there are traits associated with a genuine mother and those that are considered to deviate from the script. In addition, in her written reflection, Fezile explains what motherhood means to her:

It means caring for children showing them love and concern. It means pouring into them good values such as manners, how they treat others and speaking life and never fear into children. Motherhood also means building self-esteems of a future adult. [Reflection]

She highly values the ability to provide for her children and invest emotionally and materially. She strives to build her children's self-esteem and invest in their future. Her need to protect her children and the fear that her children might be victimised is associated with her own childhood. Traumatised children have been reported to show changed attitudes about

people, life, and the future (Terr, 1995). They tend to be less trusting of others and usually recognise vulnerability in people, including themselves. Her attitude about people concerning abuse is shown in the quote below:

> *There's certain people I don't want my family around because sometimes you are on Twitter and then that that thread of "what's eating you," and then people say my brother raped me, my uncle raped me, hey I don't want relatives in my house. When people are in my house, I look my kid's room when they go to bed at night, or at night I sleep with our door open. I light sleep if I don't trust you. Even when I had my domestic, I told her, "No one is entitled to your body."*

The fear of her children being victimised informs her how she parents and the type of mother she identifies as.

Risk and Protective Factors

Protective factors are the buffers against experiences of adversity or trauma and those that mitigate against the long-term impact of the exposure to adversity. Protective factors within Fezile's environment included her own resilience, family members who took care of her, and church and community members who created a safe environment for her. The interaction between her household, church, and school environments created meaningful buffers for some of the adversities she experienced. However, her resilience played an important role in how she made sense of her life and showed agency as a child. This was evident in how she adapted to the various changes and flourished in difficult circumstances. She was also determined to do well academically, as she expresses below.

> *But my prayers in that house, I think, eventually came to fruition. But I didn't want to go because you someone had a crush on me, and I had a crush back*

on them. My boobs were growing, I was becoming hot, you know [laughter], and I was now ready for those rich kids of Kasisi, I had found my voice, I had told myself I'm gonna do well in grade 9 because grade 9 also determines where you go from grade 10.

Personal characteristics also played a role in how she coped with her childhood experiences and influenced her later life outcomes. She describes how her family has shaped her outlook on life and her determination to achieve a better future. However, this signifies her resilience and interpretation of adversity.

… things with my family it's…it had also shaped me to be who I am. Like I want full autonomy over myself. It's also probably why I'm a lecturer because I am fully responsible for my teaching, you know. I want to make sure I have my money. I want to be in charge of my finances.

In addition to the personal characteristics, environmental factors in Fezile's ecosystem created a system of support. The interaction between her school and church environment played an important role in her development as a child. The church convent played a significant role in her adapting to the new environment and subsequently led to her finding a foster family when her aunt was no longer there to care for her. She reflects on her memorable childhood moments below.

Yes, church events were memorable, such as my first communion and confirmation. I also remember church activities for children and how those were great fun. In my early teens, I remember going away on a church trip for a few days and it was most magical. Finally, I remember a trip to Copperbelt province (in Zambia). It was great being there.

Her most memorable childhood moments were associated with her church and religious practices. In her church environment, she felt safe and could escape her reality. Even in adulthood, she makes sense of her life through spiritual lenses. Her church community is also her support system. She reconnected with God after giving birth as she describes below.

> *Before we left Cape Town, I remember I…when I was on maternity leave, I actually developed a real relationship with God. The relationship I've had with God is of growing up Catholic but it's also through people like when I met my husband, he was those saved charismatic, so I was like arg. But I never had my own, own, own except the one of my childhood. So now I've had to find God again. So, I remember now I started…that's when my dreams started, now I started getting dreams. So, the one time I remember I had a dream and God was telling me to say, you know I really want to bless you but Yhoo [sic] you are always surrounded by people*.

The availability of a consistent adult and maternal figure in Fezile's life buffered against possible adverse outcomes in her childhood. Although her aunt was not always available, the role played by other women in her life, including the nun sisters, offered her support and consistency as a child. In the same vein, the absence of family at various points of her childhood rendered her vulnerable to abuse, neglect, and displacement.

The role of a maternal figure in her life was a protective factor evident in how she spoke of her foster mother. Although she expresses the need for a "real mom," she acknowledges her foster mother's pivotal role in her life. This expresses her need for protection and care from a mother.

Like I didn't know that it hurt me that that woman died until this moment in time.

This is why a person needs a mom, a real mom, of course.

Furthermore, this expression also signals the absence of a mother as a risk factor for emotional distress. In this expression, she speaks of losing her foster mother. Fezile's story is characterised by a constant need to belong and to be accepted. The constant moves in her childhood created internal feelings of inadequacy and a need to belong. She carried this into adult life, although this was not a factor concerning her parenting. She describes her acceptance that her mother will never accept her, as well as her need to be accepted in different spaces, including her religious community and work environment. As a parent, she protects her children from being victimised and creates a safe environment for them. However, her fears are sometimes directed at her husband, which can cause tensions.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings from Fezile's interview and highlighted the main themes identified from her story. Fezile's narrative shows various phases of her childhood. Her upbringing was characterised by times of stability and instability in these various phases. Stability referred mainly to the times when she was cared for and had consistent adults in her life, whereas instability was related to frequent changes in living arrangements and inconsistencies from adult caregivers. The complex trauma narrative captures the cumulative adversities she experienced and relates to her complex living arrangements. Her story also shows the family dynamics she grappled with in her parent's home and the domestic abuse she witnessed. All these experiences informed her maternal identity and how she constructs motherhood.

Chapter 6: Moloko's Story: Creating Meaning from Trauma

Introduction

Moloko is a 33-year-old woman, married with two children. She was born and partly raised in her grandmother's house since her parents were not married at the time of her birth. She is the second born of six children; however, she is the first child born to both her parents. Her father had a child before her parent's relationship. She has experienced physical abuse, neglect, and sexual abuse and witnessed violence within the community and home (domestic violence). However, she buried her childhood memories and often chose not to speak of certain parts of her childhood. She reflects on her childhood, stating that she mainly refers to her teenage years as her childhood was not pleasant mainly due to her father's alcoholism and violence within the home. Although her grandmother was their primary guardian, Moloko lived with relatives in multiple places especially after losing her parents.

Primary Analytical Themes

Upbringing: Unstable Movements and Associated Memory

Moloko moved a lot in her childhood, mainly because her parents were not married when she was born. She recalls how many times she moved homes until she was older and in her teens.

> *I choose [sic] where I grew up; I didn't stay in one place. Apparently, from there, I moved for a year to Dennilton, then I got sick, and then I moved to [name of a place]. I stayed there until…I think I moved in '98.*
>
> *…I think I moved like 4 times… like my life has just been about moving; I think I was only stable when I got to Pretoria.*

I am a child who moved a lot; it depends on conversation I choose where I grew up, I didn't stay in one place.

It seems that she does not have a memory of the times she moved in her earlier childhood, as she relies on stories from her family members who recall her childhood. This could be related to her repressed memory and dissociation from her earlier experiences. To avoid speaking about her childhood, she often chooses certain points of her life when describing her origins. She reflects on how she has blocked out certain memories.

I think it's the question that made the delay cause with me childhood, it's not something I really think about or talk about. Most of the time when I talk about my childhood, I refer to my teenage years like from the age of 15 when I moved. It's just one or two things that I'd talk about in my childhood in reference to the conversation I'm having with a person cause' it was, it was not a nice childhood, so I try by all means to block it out, block, block, block. I block it out cause' it was not nice. [Reflection]

Moloko's reflection on how she had blocked out her childhood and often dissociated from her childhood indicates the compartmentalisation of painful memories and feelings that occurs in individuals who experienced maltreatment in their childhood (Cook et al., 2005; Mitchell & Steele, 2021). She has gotten accustomed to this compartmentalisation, which can affect her affectivity towards her children. However, she is not detached from her emotions and has an awareness of self.

In describing her origins, Moloko chooses any of the places where she grew up and narrates her history according to the memories from that place. This positioning highlights the multiplicity of her identity and sense of belonging. The constant moving was perceived to be abrupt and shows a child's agentic state.

…the moving as a child is not always nice, because constantly you have to start afresh, you had to start afresh, you had to start afresh, when you are settling in, they just uproot you.

They don't even talk to you, you are a child, they don't discuss it with you, that we are going to move, and this is happening, they just… we are moving. Okay, I am settling in we are moving; I am settling in, Yoh the move was just unsettling for us as children and most of the time it was because it was my dad's fault, that we had a lot of moves.

The quote above also shows how unsettling the constant changes were for Moloko. Moving resulted from multiple factors, including her parents' relationship, her father's employment, health issues, and domestic violence.

My living situation was not always good, so I always had to move from one place to another…move from one place to another. I think [name of place] I stayed was from 2006 to 2009, even then I was in between two places.

The quote above indicates that her living conditions were not ideal. This is mainly concerning her father's alcoholism and domestic violence. Her mother would intermittently move the children to protect them from their father's violence and alcohol abuse. However, it was also evident that the community they lived in was violent and seeped into alcohol abuse. Although she describes these moves as unsettling for children, her mother sought stability for her and her siblings. However, the constant changes also meant changes in schools, although she does not indicate how she was affected academically.

I went to two primary schools and two high schools, I started at [mentions location] when I was staying with my grandparents after I got sick and what not. So, I did preschool and grade 1 there so my dad became permanent at

[mentions workplace], him and my mom they managed to buy a house, then they moved all the kids to come stay with them. From grade 2 to grade 7 I was in the same school, grade 8 to mid-grade 10 I was in the same school, grade 10 to grade 12 that's when I moved to [mentions different place].

Trauma Narrative

Moloko provided accounts of her traumatic experiences, including her father's struggles with alcoholism, domestic violence in the home, and exposure to community violence. Her father's alcoholism and violence affected various aspects of their lives, including their living conditions, schooling, and interpersonal relationships within the family. Moloko interpreted her father's violence as not being "normal." She distinguished between what she considers normal discipline or arguments between adults and her father's seemingly extreme behaviour. The two quotes below show a discourse of normality and of abnormality, although she is not pathologizing her father's behaviour.

And he was throwing them in the house, like breaking, there was nowhere to walk, breaking bottles. And we were in the bathroom, and he opened and start [sic] throwing them on the wall, and the glass was splashing in the water, and we were in the water bathing, so my mother quickly took us out and took us to the bedroom and locked us in there. I mean, like... for me, which normal person does that? Because what if that glass got inside the eyes, yes, I had a few scratches on my back, but because I turned but what if it really hurt me? Because he was throwing it in the corners so that it can splash and even when we went out of the water there was nowhere to walk, because the whole house was full of glasses, and I don't know what type of anger drives a person to do something like that.

Although she does not pathologise her father, her discourse alludes to her positioning of her father and the extent of the domestic violence. Moreover, the quote below shows the interconnectedness of the various systems that Moloko interacted with and those she did not have direct contact with; however, they affected her life.

> *Like I said he was a drunkard, and a man who is a drunkard is not the best of… because apparently, he would eat and chow his salary and not pay the bond and what not, and back in the days they were not, where we come from it was not like now, I don't know now, now at-least the bank are* [sic] *a bit more lenient.*
>
> *There we would come back from school we would see certain houses, literally the bank comes and takes out your furniture and locks the house and we would be scared and to say oh Lord I am in the transport, what if I get home and this is the situation. So, to avoid that my mother would always make us move to relative.*

When asked if she thinks her father's behaviour was due to anger. She alludes to deeper reasons unbeknown to her as a child. As an adult now she also questions her mother's reasons for staying in an abusive marriage.

> *I don't even know, because I was just a child, I don't know if he was angry or he was doing, like his doings were extreme…*
>
> *Like they were not normal and like he would literally just beat up everyone, everyone, including my aunts, everyone, I mean I don't think its anger I think it's something beyond and it grew because they protected it, even my mother protected it because I don't think there is any reason that would make me want to stay in a*

marriage for that long with that amount of abuse, so I don't know what her reason was for staying, yeah but…

The neighbourhood factors also affected Moloko's childhood. The consistent exposure to alcoholism, violence, and families being disposed of their homes made her hypervigilant and fearful. She was exposed to an unsafe neighbourhood.

> *I remember this other time he was knocking, and we didn't open, and he was knocking so hard he even broken a window and we had to stay for the longest without a window and worse it was in our room, so it was just not a safe environment, so [mentions location] was much more safer for us because of the level of security that was there.*

In addition, the quote below shows how her father's behaviour affected her socially and the sense of shame she carried as a child.

> *Which it was not nice, and not only for us at home but you know he was so loud, and you know that the whole neighbourhood knows and then tomorrow you have to go out as a child and play, you like Yoh they heard what happened last night how am I going to play? So, it also affected our social life as well to go out.*

Her father's work and economic means influenced the violence in the home. When he was employed and received his payment, he drank and was disruptive. When he did not have money, he was withdrawn and not affectionate. Moreover, losing his employment made him more violent towards the children. This shows the ecosystem of violence and abuse and the interacting factors that impede Moloko's development. There seem to be intergenerational cycles of adversities and abuse within her extended family. Alcoholism has become a way of coping amongst the younger generation within her family.

...that situation made us who we are and some its good and some its very, very bad and I think for me, I can just be grateful for Christianity because Lord knows where I going to be, cause my siblings are drunkards.

However, Moloko has broken the cycle in her life by living a different life and ascribing to spirituality. However, the continuity of trauma is seen in the silencing within the family and how her father was protected even after his death.

my grandparents took us with and then that caused division in the family because, I don't know if people, I just didn't understand, how can people say that we were wrong for doing that, because my paternal side they blamed me for the longest, they blamed me for the longest that I killed my dad. There is still some they say I killed my dad, I just have to live with it that

Because her father died from a heart attack, during her teenage years, while awaiting trial for an incident that Moloko reported to the police, she was blamed for her father's death. She grapples with making sense of the silencing in the family and the shifting of blame.

they still said we needed to come, so yeah that was that but then there were still family members, I didn't go to my paternal side for the longest time because one of my aunts literally told me that you killed my brother and I was like this woman never even asked what happened, how was your living arrangement, why didn't they even ask their younger sister why did she leave but for them it's like no he was never wrong

The children were taught not to speak to relatives about the abuse occurring in the house.

...we didn't really talk much about what happened in our household to our relatives because we were taught not to talk.

They knew! They just choose not to believe. I mean everyone knew that my dad was a … like literally, everyone, like if you didn't know that my dad was abusive it was your doing, because he didn't hide it. When he's drunk, he did it publicly.

Her second comment above shows that the abuse was an open secret. The protection her father received from her family is associated with his ability to provide for the extended family. Conversely, other intergenerational factors could be at play within a polygamous family.

He was their provider, my grandfather had two wives, my grandmother was the youngest wife. My dad had one brother and three sisters, so the other sons, most sons were from the other households and my dad was the only one working among the siblings, so he was their provider, for them its if he is gone, what will we eat?

The level of respect they gave him, and protection was ridiculous, because they protected him from everything and unnecessary things. Then we didn't see it but they would find…it's so funny that even now they still don't find any fault in him, even when he is gone, even my grandmother still says, you know my child just died because of people who didn't like him and I feel like a part of my grandmother she blames me but she can't [say it]

There seems to be a culture of silencing in the family. Her father enjoyed protection within a patriarchal system that overlooked his behaviour, and this further propelled him to be violent. In addition, Moloko's narrative also shows the multiple losses she experienced through death in the family. Her mother passed away after an illness. These losses had different meanings to her as a child. She spoke little about her mother's passing and her

individual experience of the loss. However, she mentions associated incidents, such as having to live with their father. The pain of her father's death is associated with a lack of justice as she feels that he escaped punishment and received impunity through death.

> *Before, that also made me angry that why does he have an easy way out, because for me that felt like this is an easy way out. Why he never got to account for what he did, or even see the wrong in what he did, nothing he just died, just like that and we had to go bury him [inaudible] and then the court case came and we had to go to court again without him because [….] We still had to go to court.*

Moloko narrates her trauma and tries to make sense of her experiences. She connects the family dynamics and environmental and socioeconomic factors that contributed to her experiences within her household. In this narrative, there are proximal processes that played a pivotal role in shaping her outcomes.

Collective Motherhood and Parenting

Moloko's childhood shows collective parenting within her family and the role of the kinship structure. In her family structure the collective motherhood was prominent, where women, including her grandmother and aunts, mothered her at various stages of her life. Because her mother was not married, they first lived with their grandparents in the family home.

> *[…] it's my great-grandmother's house because my mother was not yet married so she was staying with her grandmother then…*
>
> *Sometimes it was me moving to my grandmother's place, sometimes it was my grandmother calling me to come.*

In this home her grandmother cared for them when her mother was working. After the loss of her mother and, subsequently, her father, Moloko's aunt and grandmother were her maternal figures who provided for them emotionally and materially.

> *I don't know, I was staying with my aunt because of transport to school and sometimes I go to my grandmother because she was basically my main guardian, so it was in-between the two.*

However, the experiences of this collective mothering or "othermothers" are not always positive. Moloko describes being made to feel like an outsider in her aunt's house and how she was evidently treated differently.

> *She [her aunt] was turning 50. And I just said, I want to honour you while you are alive. Yes, there were times where I felt like you didn't love me. But I'm grateful that you took me in because I was a burden you never expected. And some things I couldn't see because I was a child, but you made sure that you give me a life my mother would have wanted me to have.*

However, she acknowledges her aunt's pivotal role in creating normalcy in her life after the loss of her mother. This positions her aunt as her mother. At this point, both her parents had passed on. The relatives also collectively contributed to her university fees, ensuring her education.

> *I remember I had ten thousand cash, coming to pay, and everyone had chipped in to make sure that they pay my school fees. So, I'm grateful for that. I, I, I'll always be grateful because it was not a force for them to do so,*

The family had a sense of collectivism and shared responsibilities. The responsibility for parenting was shared even when her parents were alive. Even when it was challenging, the family shared care responsibilities when Moloko and her sibling were orphaned. The

children were split up, and Moloko's younger brother was left in the care of her paternal family. For cultural reasons, the sisters lived with the maternal family, and the boy, lived with the paternal family. This affected the relationship between the children and the perceptions they have about their family history. This also includes perceptions on their parent's deaths.

Maternal Identity

Moloko's maternal identity is intertwined with her parenting style. She seems to display an authoritative parenting style, characterised by her warmth and responsiveness to her children and how she cares for their physical and emotional needs. She also sets clear boundaries and expectations although her children are very young. Moloko positions herself as a protector.

> *And then what motherhood means to me, it means that as a mother I must protect. I must always be there for my children you know. [Reflection]*
>
> *I don't know, I'm a strict mom. I am very strict to my children but strict in a way to shape them to be better.*

The comment about being strict about shaping her children to be better shows her perception of a mother as the one to model children into what they desire them to be. She cares for her children and wants to model them to be better. Furthermore, her childhood trauma has led to her being an overprotective mother, as she describes below.

> *I am very overprotective over my children, I think maybe that's one of the things that made me be so overprotective. I love my children, I want them to be free around everyone but I am very protective, that is why it's so hard for me to allow my kids to sleepover because Lord knows what is happening in other households that I don't want my children picking up, because you see what abuse does, it shapes you, it shapes you as a person.*

The abuse she experienced as a child has shaped her as a person and the mother she is. Although trauma shapes a person, she ascribes to the view that the individual is not powerless, that they choose in what way the trauma shapes them.

> *So it shapes you, so you choose which way you want to be shaped, so me I choose to be protective over my children but one thing I told myself is that, I want my children to grow up in a loving home, in a warm home, in a place where they will be able to express themselves without fear, and if I find the situation toxic for me, I'd rather leave and raise them as a single parent or their dads to raise them as a single parent*

Moloko shields her children from experiencing unhealthy family dynamics and from being exposed to trauma. She shields them from her own family and sometimes from her husband, as she describes how her traumatic childhood impacts her parenting.

> *Because even after I had my [mentions child's name], my first born, I still had a bit of fear. Like I said, it was just me and my husband. And sometimes when he would want to help, I was, I was very reluctant with him around [mentions child's name], until I spoke about it. And someone told me no don't do that, allow him to be a father. Because I would get angry even when he shouts at him because it would trigger things to say no don't talk to my child like this…you know, because we got, we were in fear when my dad started shouting. So now, I was denying him an opportunity to raise his children, to parent his child, you can't do this to your child. You can't talk to a child like this, and it was just all my fears. And that I had to let go of …. but it didn't take me long because I spoke about it. I was told to come down, I am calm.*

Maybe it's me, I just learned to, I let things pass, I won't be killed by stress guys.

She seems to have positioned herself as a protector during those earlier years when she had to protect herself and her siblings from the violence in their home. In a way, she mothered her younger siblings after their mother's death. As a mother, she is aware of her triggers and how this affects her parenting, and she has learnt effective ways to manage her emotions. Although she is protective of her children, she desires that they become free and not experience the dynamics of the relationships in her family of origin.

So as a parent, I want peace for my children. Wanting peace for my children, I don't want my children to be subjected to this drama or find themselves having to choose family members whilst it had nothing to do with them. Because now I take them everywhere. They go and visit them, I am there, I won't allow sleep overs. I don't allow sleep overs in any case until I am free to allow them.

Although she protects her children from her family, she does allow them to interact with the family to create normalcy in their lives. She is conscious of creating a healthy environment for her children and not impeding their development.

I don't want my children growing up and hearing stories because if you don't do this, they grow up, they ask questions and people start feeding them the wrong information. So, with me I don't want them to grow up saying mommy doesn't talk to whoever and all, no, no. It's just me, I don't want my children to grow up in such an environment, I want them to be happy and free with everyone and not carry my hate, my enemies, but I just want them to be free with everyone.

The Role of Seeking Help and Psychological Intervention

Moloko seems to have found effective ways to manage her psychological triggers, especially concerning parenting. She first found psychological help at her school as a teenager. She describes how her trauma manifested through her essay writing that was flagged, and she was referred to a school psychologist. Her exposure to therapy at a young age made her value its role in her healing.

> *And as much as people say multiracial schools, what-what. I'm grateful that I continued there because I wouldn't have known that I needed therapy until I wrote an essay.*

Her school environment provided a buffer for the negative outcomes of her traumatic childhood and the anger she carried. Therapy was a protective factor in her outcome compared to her siblings, who were exposed to the same trauma but had negative coping responses. As an adult, she regularly visits a psychologist, which shows her help-seeking behaviour. Speaking about her daily challenges, including the triggers that remind her of her upbrings, has helped her to gain perspective.

She described how she would react when her husband disciplined their children. However, she later gained a renewed perspective after she openly spoke about her triggers.

> *You know, because we got, we were in fear when my dad started shouting. So now, I was denying him an opportunity to raise his children, to parent his child, you can't do this to your child. You can't talk to a child like this, and it was just all my fears. And that I had to let go of .... but it didn't take me long because I spoke about it. I was told to come down, I am calm. Maybe it's me, I just learned to, I let things pass, I won't be killed by stress guys.*

In addition to the psychological intervention, Moloko's help-seeking behaviour was evident in her reporting her father's abuse and harassment to the police.

> *[…] so that was that, so we got him arrested in March 2006 and in July 2007, you know cases in South Africa takes time, our court case was only for September 2007, imagine.*
>
> *[if a person is out on bail] They are free until court case, so July 2007 he died out of a heart attack.*

Moloko reported her father to the police, but she felt that the justice system had failed them by granting her father bail (a sum of money paid to the court while a person is awaiting trial or pending its finalisation).

Socio-economic and Cultural Factors

Cultural and socioeconomic factors had an impact on the participant's childhood and later life outcomes. Her parents' socioeconomic status resulted in constant movements and relocation. Parents moved due to work opportunities. Moreover, there was an interaction between her father's alcohol problem and his employment. She describes living in a mining area with a culture of alcoholism among males.

> *he was not the only drunkard in the street, we had quite a few dads in our neighbourhood that were drunkards. Basically like 70% of the men in our street were drunkards.*

Alcoholism was common in fathers in the community, while the community was characterised by violence.

> *They would literally sit together and drink and go cause havoc, so the shame was there, but it was not much, because it was like in our neighbourhood it*

was a norm. There were literally, if they are not fighting in the house, you find that its neighbours fighting. It was Kasi [township], typical kasi [township], everyone is fighting, everyone is drinking, everyone smoking, everyone is, everyone is, so I wouldn't say my social life was really, it was sometimes hard if he was the only one making noise that night…

It seems that violence and alcoholism were normalised in this community which forced the children to adapt. Furthermore, her paternal family had destructive sociocultural patterns of alcoholism and silencing, which affected their family dynamics. Moloko is convinced that the family was aware of her father's abusive ways however they protected him because he was their provider.

He was their provider, my grandfather had two wives, my grandmother was the youngest wife. My dad had one brother and three sisters, so the other sons, most sons were from the other households and my dad was the only one working among the siblings, so he was their provider, for them its if he is gone, what will we eat?

The family's socioeconomic status contributed to the normalisation of abuse and silence. This was to the extent that she was blamed for reporting her father to the police and subsequently for his death from a heart attack. Her family seemed to avoid having difficult conversations about family dynamics and alcoholism. The silencing of trauma occurred within her nuclear family, where the children were taught not to speak about what happens in the home; however, it also occurred within the extended family and community, where it seems everyone was aware, but no one would address the abuse. She describes complex silencing in the following quotes.

They knew! They just choose not to believe. I mean everyone knew that my dad was a … like literally, everyone, like if you didn't know that my dad was abusive it was your doing, because he didn't hide it. When he's drunk, he did it publicly.

The culture of silence and shame surrounding abuse in most communities is much more common when the perpetrators are kinsmen, fathers, brothers. This often leaves family members conflicted when coming to reporting abuse and giving power to the authorities.

Conclusion

In this chapter I presented the findings from Moloko's interview and highlighted the patterns in her story. The themes highlight her challenging upbringing and its impact on their life, as well as her transition into motherhood. Her childhood was characterised by constant moving, domestic abuse, her father's problem with alcohol, intergeneration cycles of abuse, and multiple losses through death. However, protective factors such as her school environment and other mothers buffered against the possible adverse effects of her traumatic childhood. Her parenting is largely shaped by her childhood experiences and the family dynamics with her extended family. She emphasised the importance of therapy in her healing process and her determination to keep fighting despite the ongoing fear and struggles.

Chapter 7: Sibongile's Story: Modelled Motherhood

Introduction

Sibongile is a 37-year-old woman born in 1986. She is the third child of four sisters. She was raised in a two-parent home, although her father worked away from home and was rarely present. When her father was present in the home, there was fear among the children. This fear stemmed from the father's strictness and his beating their mother often, to the point that she almost lost her life. Sibongile was very young when the violence occurred and recalls little of the incidences compared to her older siblings. She is now a mother of two and co-parents with her children's fathers. In addition, she has adopted her sister's infant after her sister's death.

Primary Analytical Themes

Trauma Narrative: Domestic Abuse and Neglect

Although she narrated little of the traumatic events, her story shows how witnessing the abuse of a parent has shaped her as a mother. Sibongile grew up in a home where her father abused her mother, and the children feared their father. Her parents divorced when she was young. According to her, she buried her painful childhood memories and only started openly speaking about her childhood now in her adulthood.

> *[…] to be honest with you, I've, I don't know maybe if it's me or what, I've tend to bury…I don't know, I've tend to bury the past. To think about it now, mhhm, I was young man. I was young and I hardly talk about this. I think the first time that I mentioned it to somebody it was I think [friend's name] because I've never spoken about it.[Reflection]*

She buried the memories of her traumatic childhood and silenced her own pain. It is not clear if her father was abusive towards them as children; however, it is clear that the children feared their father. She compares what she was exposed concerning her siblings who were older than her.

> *You see, now at home he tends to beat his wife. He is abusing his wife, that's the environment that I…I grew up until I think I was six or seven. You see, until my mother decided to pull out, because imagine I have, as I said, I have brothers imagine if they grow up in that environment, you see, so I yes, I might not have more experience of what had happened because my mother protected me from it.*

With regards to her dissociative memory, she does not recall the events that occurred when she was very young; however, she vividly remembers her parents' divorce and the domestic abuse in the house. She describes her father as a monster feared by his children.

> *…but then when he gets home, then my wife part is no longer there. You see, and all of us now, we are afraid that hey the monster, you see, because I remember once apostle made example, he said there was a man that you know in his house they given him a nickname that he is a monster. When he comes in, they're like the monsters and I laughed, because that's how we viewed our father. Yes, we used to view our father. There's now, when he would come you will hear with whistles, like hey the monster is here. All of us would be like, we would be scared, we will sit in one place, we won't move because we don't know what what's next if you do this, you don't know if it's wrong. If you do this, you don't know it's wrong. So that's how we grow up.*

This shows they did not have a healthy relationship with their father, their fear, and lack of freedom in his presence. The children seem to have adopted a coping mechanism to adapt to their home environment. As a preacher, her father showed a public persona that differed from who he was at home. This is described in the quote below.

> *Imagine now having a father who's a Bishop, but then in front of people, he is a very nice, good guy, at home he's a monster. You see, now at home he tends to beat his wife. He is abusing his wife, that's the environment that I, I grew up until I think I was 6 or 7.*

The nature of abuse in the private home was such that her mother almost lost her life.

> *So that's what happened that she stayed in the marriage even though she was abused, you know, to a point whereby she almost died. She almost lost her life.*

Her mother's experiences of staying in an abusive marriage shaped her perception of women who remain in such relationships. She also reflects on the long-term impact of domestic abuse, although she mainly focuses on her mother's trauma.

> *Now I have to start again, but yeah, we managed man, we managed. Even though it ... You know when you have been abused, you can't forget you. Yes, you can't hear. Most especially because I would talk to my mother and sometimes you will see her that it is still painful that she had to go through all of that.*

The impact of the domestic violence led to Sibongile learning to fight physically and defending herself in romantic relationships where she sensed a threat.

> *So, he was like, hey, you know then he pulled me into the bedroom because he wanted me to be angry. He pulled me into the bedroom then he locked the*

room. He said that he was going to sleep. I stood, I looked at him and that's when I started being angry because I can very be angry and besides, I did the defence classes, of karate and all of that. I think also I was prepared enough to say hey I no man is going to beat [laughing], you know. So now he locked it and then you, he slept, and I asked him, "Opened the door for me". He ignored me. I became angry that day. I lifted the bed and he fell, and he came back, he slapped me…

The trauma narrative centres around witnessing domestic violence in the home and its impact on later life outcomes in relationships and raising children. She learnt to protect herself and enlisted for martial arts.

I was just showing him that don't ever lay a hand on me because it's never going to end well. It's not going to end well at all. And he never did up until we broke up. So hence I'm saying that, you know, when you grow up in that environment, you're always on guard, that any mistake you jump and you prepare yourself.

She has become hyper alert and ready to defend herself to avoid going through the same experience as her mother.

You become ready? Yeah, that if anything, you come across somebody just because now you know the pain that your mother went through, and you don't want to go through that.

Sibongile considers her father to have neglected his children after the divorce. She mentions that the children lived with their father after the divorce, and she was taken to live with her mother without her father knowing. The rest of her siblings subsequently came to

live with their mother without their father knowing. According to her, their father took care of other children and neglected his previous family.

Intergenerational Cycles of Abuse

The culture of abuse can be traced to the patriarchal views that women should be disciplined by their husbands. To make sense of her father's abuse, Sibongile refers to the old patriarchal traditions and a historical time when a man was permitted to beat his wife. She explains as follows:

> *So now my father, you know those olden days men? Whereby how they grow up is that thing that they carry in their mind that they grew up knowing that the wife is beaten.*

When asked whether she thought her father considered physical beating as a form of discipline, Sibongile ascribes her father's behaviour to his own upbringing.

> *No, I think because whenever I would talk to my mother and I would say like, you know what, that's how he, he grew up. That's what he knew, and he saw his parents doing.*

Her father grew up in an unstable environment where he witnessed violence. Sibongile considers upbringing as an important factor in developing one's character.

> *He had the worst upbringing from what I hear, he had the worst, because he was apparently, he was raised by a single parent. And he moved from one place to another. Yah and you know that abuse. So, he grew up knowing that, OK, there's this thing and this is how it's happening. You see. So that is why I said that the upbringing played a huge role, you know, in his character as well yes.*

Her father was raised during a time where the men had the final word in the home. She does not consider her father a bad person, but that he was a product of the behaviour modelled in his home.

> *So that's how he, I when I look at it because now, he is not a bad man, Mara. Because of the way he grew up and the way I understand the things that happened in his life. So, he carried that he that my word is my way, you see, You, as a wife, you don't have a say. If I say jump, you don't ask, you jump, it doesn't matter how high you get, as long as you are jumping (laughing). That's how he grew up.*

Although she empathizes with her father, she is aware of how growing up in an abusive home affected her in her own relationships. She also experienced physical abuse in a relationship however she learned to defend herself. In her own romantic relationship, she describes domestic violence between her and her partner, where she fought for herself.

> *I became angry that day. I lifted the bed and he fell, and he came back, he slapped me. That was the first mistake, the second mistake, the first one was to lock me. The second one slapped me.*
>
> *That time, he did the same. I lifted the bed and he fell. He was about to slap me, I kicked him, and he fell. I jumped on top of him, it was like I was Spiderwoman [laughing]. I jumped on top of him, I held his hands, with my feet. I made sure that he didn't get any chance, you know, to lay a hand on me. And I started beating him, it was like I was hitting a child. The worst day ever because I hear him crying saying, you are killing me, and I stopped.*

Sibongile unconsciously adopted certain behaviours and attitudes modelled by her own parents and the interactions between them, continuing the legacy of abuse.

Resilient Motherhood and Maternal Identity

When asked what motherhood means to her, Sibongile gives the following meaning.

> *It means I'm proud hey. It means that, I have responsibilities. It means I have people looking after, you know, looking up to me. You see, it means that, I, I'm looking after people. It means that there are precious souls that don't know the way that I need to lead, you see, and guide, you know, it's like this Psalms that I said I love, Psalms 23. You know that says the Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want that's being a mother. You shepherd your flocks, you see. You see, isikhukhukazi (hen), I'm not sure if you know isikhukhukazi [sic], but you must know it because you… there's there is a Xhosa is it somewhere, you see. Isikhukhukazi what it does is that it will protect her children like this, and it won't allow anything to happen to its children that's being a mother, you pray.*

She uses an analogy of a hen that protects her chicks. In addition, she uses a bible scripture alluding to a mother being a shepherd providing, guiding, and protecting her children. She uses these analogies to give meaning to her role and how she constructs motherhood. Sibongile uses her mother as a yardstick for good motherhood and sacrifice. Her mother's positioning shows resilience through mothering and fighting to break free from an abusive marriage. Her mother fled her marriage and started a new life, which included working for the first time. In her narration, Sibongile also weaves in her mother's strength, which she identifies with. Her mother left her marriage and started by looking for a job before she could take her children to live with her. Sibongile's mother used religion as a coping mechanism after separating from her husband and as a source of hope.

She is positioned as a self-sacrificing ideal mother. The resilience Sibongile's mother modelled is pivotal towards understanding what shaped Sibongile's maternal identity and

construction of motherhood. She believes that a mother's sacrifice for her children signifies love which she associates with her mother's sacrifices. She discusses motherhood using adjectives that describe different ideologies of motherhood and what she has observed from her own mother.

> *It means I'm proud hey. It means that, I have responsibilities. It means I have people looking after, you know, looking up to me.*
>
> *Motherhood to me it means accountability, it means love, it means sacrifice, it means protector, it means provider. That's motherhood, it means mentor, it means, you know, guider, it means prayer warrior because those are the things that I've seen my mother doing and I'm still seeing her doing for her children. [Reflection]*
>
> *So that's what motherhood to me means that my children mustn't suffer because I suffered you see. My children mustn't see me cry for instance; I'm just making an example.[Reflection]*

Her construction of motherhood centres around providing and taking care of her children's needs. She also holds the view that women make sacrificial decisions, such as staying in an abusive relationship for the children's sake.

> *you see, that is why when somebody says that I've been abused or I'm being abused, I can't judge instead support them, because you, what you think, what you know, it's not what that person thinks and know, and it's not what person sees, because you would tell them that leave their husband. You are not in her shoes. You don't know what is what's making her to stay. Maybe it's because of her children. That's the first, that I don't want my children to grow up without their father. It's not nice as a parent to have that. You see.*

Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented the findings from my interview and the reflection from Sibongile. Sibongile's story was characterised by domestic violence, financial struggles, and resilience through motherhood. She witnessed her father's violence towards her mother which influenced her adult relationships. Sibongile's childhood informed her maternal identity; however, she modelled much of her mother's maternal values of raising children as a single parent. She showed a great ability to withstand adversities which she modelled after her mother.

Chapter 8: Hunadi's Story: A Search for Identity

Introduction

Hunadi is a 37-year-old (born 1986) married mother of three children. She was a neat and smart child at school and was admired by her teachers. She was partly raised by her grandparents and enjoyed the village life of agriculture. She admired her father, although she later discovered that he was not her biological father and lost contact with him. She felt that her mother neglected her and did not love her. She had a better relationship with her grandmother, who raised her for much of her childhood. Her mother sporadically took her to live with her. Still, her inconsistent living arrangements led to her living with her grandmother mostly. She was sexually molested by her nanny and blamed her mother for not noticing that something was wrong. She became pregnant in Grade 12 in her teenage years.

Primary Analytical Themes

Stability vs Instability

Hunadi had an unstable upbringing and adulthood; however, there were times of stability in these phases of life. She has a history of moving between her mother's and grandmother's houses. She felt neglected by her mother, who was working and still in university during her (Hunadi's) childhood. Her grandmother provided stability when her mother's living circumstances would change. In the following quotes, she describes her movements and living arrangements.

> *[…]and then [I] stayed there for 4 years, moved after my grandfather passed away. We moved to [a different location], like life was up and down, you know from [that place]. My granny bought a house because I was staying with my granny and her children, my mom and her siblings and my mom was still in school, so she completed, and I moved again. Ok while she was still at school*

because she got married, I moved to [my mother's place] where I did my preschool, Creche and then I moved again back to [my grandmother's house], moved again to [my mother's place] that's where they bought a house, 98 they got divorced moved back to [my grandmother's].

In some cases, the moves and relocations were done abruptly. Although there were times of stability, Hunadi describes her childhood as "never stable," and she describes herself as *"a girl on the move."*

My childhood was never stable, I moved (relocating) quite along which in most case happened abruptly. I was the only child to my mom for a long period of time 9 years to be precise. I changed primary schools a lot some I started in the beginning of the year, some I went in the middle of a term because of situations either with a school or because my parents were fighting. I was quiet, shy girl who never kept friendships because of I was always "a girl on the move".[Reflection]

At some point in her life, she was living with her stepfather, she thought was her biological father.

I remember I enjoyed holidays more than anything because it meant I got to spend a lot of time with my mom as I didn't stay with her full time as she was a student who later found was employed at a primary school far from our home, so she stayed there whilst I stayed with my paternal grandparents and later on with my father. Holidays were the time I was most happy. Some of my childhood I really can't remember because I might have blocked it out as it was unpleasant.[Reflection]

The most memorable time of her childhood is the time spent with her mother whom she did not live with. She lived with her grandparents and for some time with her father. She explains how her life took a downward spiral after she found out that the man who raised her was not her biological father. She started to rebel against her mother, which led her to falling pregnant during her final year of school. Her life stabilised when she was given an opportunity to go to college and continue her studies. However, she decided to return home to care for her child. Even in her adult life, Hunadi moved a lot in search of stability and a better life for her and her children.

Complex Trauma Narrative

Hunadi experienced multiple adversities as a child, including neglect, sexual abuse, and witnessing the abuse of a parent. Her narrative reflected cumulative ACE as well as other issues in her adolescence and adult life. Her exposure to complex trauma rendered her vulnerable to more trauma and other impairments, including (i.e., teenage pregnancy) (Cook et al., 2005).

In her reflection, Hunadi states that she might have blocked out some of her unpleasant memories; however, in the interview, she opened up about much of the traumatic childhood memories. This is consistent with alterations in consciousness because of trauma and the compartmentalisation of painful feelings and memories associated with complex trauma (Cook et al., 2005). The interview was a space for her to break her silence and to reflect on her relationship with her mother.

Physical and Emotional Neglect. She perceived her mother as being neglectful, which she ascribes to the constant moving around and being left in the care of others. She considered her mother to be an inconsistent caregiver, and this brought feelings of being unwanted and unloved.

Because that thing that you fell in love with someone, that someone broke your heart, yet my mom here she is, I felt she doesn't love me, she loves my younger brother more. So, because even the things that would happen, I would say I want this, they would do for him, I want this they would do for him. I just felt I am a useless child.

She also felt that her love for her mother was not reciprocated.

I mean, you must know my mom, I am a child who listens to her, who cares a lot about her, but I feel it's not reciprocated, I give but she just sprinkles you understand me. I love my mom so much but the way she shows me, I feel she hates me because of my biological dad.

She felt that her siblings were being favoured more than her.

She just shouts, so I felt I cannot stay and do nothing and then, another thing is that my younger brother is naughty, he was stealing from me, stuff and stuff so even when I report to my mom, she wouldn't do anything, so I'd suffer alone, things like that. Imagine i go and work, I come back with the money that I make he would steal the day's profit, imagine that is so devastating. When I tell my mom that I'd get him arrested, she'd say there won't be police coming to my house, you see, there won't be police coming to my house.

Her mother provided certain material things for her siblings and not for her. She felt she was being neglected because of her biological father.

So, it's fine, uhm my mom, it's that thing where I'd confront [her] and stop myself because she was not opening up. So uhm we are from the same mother, me and my siblings right, but we were not the same, they would have everything they wanted, my younger brother would wear brands and I would ask and would

get them. But imagine a 12- or 13-year-old wearing brands, and I would have asked my mom prior that may you please buy me this sneakers, I am in high school mind you, and my mom wouldn't buy it for me, bite, bite, my brother is wearing something.

Even as an adult she battles with feelings of being unwanted and questions her mother's love for her. Although her mother takes care of her, she does not interpret this as an act of love but keeping up with appearances.

So, eish [sic], I don't know if my mom, I don't know if she hates me, I don't know even today I just don't know. I once asked her, and she said it's impossible, but I feel that she hates me. The things that she does for me, even taking me to school, she is not doing it for me, she is doing it for herself, and other people. So that people can say, wow she took her daughter to school.

Sexual abuse. Hunadi was molested by her nanny. She was also molested by an older guy at a home where she would be left in the care of relatives when her parents were working. She felt that her mother neglected her and missed the signs of abuse.

And mind you I was sexually molested by a nanny. It was my nanny at home while I was still young; I think I was four or three I can't remember.

So, when the husband would come home, I would move out of my mother's room and sleep with the nanny. And I ask myself, didn't you see, didn't you feel my cry? The way I was crying, I didn't want her, that woman. And all these things I told her only in 2009, explaining that I went through this, I was sexually molested.

Hunadi felt that her mother did not protect her as a child but acknowledged that her mother tried to comfort her later when she broke her silence about the molestation; however, her pain blinded her to her mother's support.

Domestic Violence and Divorce. Although her stepfather treated her like his own child and was a "perfect gentleman", the same man was abusive towards Hunadi's mother. She witnessed her stepfather's abuse of her mother.

> *So, and this thing has been going on for the longest of time because my mom, she was married to an abuser, so this guy abused her like in my eyes, I'd see everything, so I was… the last straw was when I confronted him and asked what is it, when I saw that he beat her up to a point where she was bleeding.*
>
> *That's him [Her step father], that's the one I grew up with before they divorced, the abuse was an ongoing thing, like some days my mom would come with bruised eyes, some days, it's over the weekend, remember I stayed with her, just the two of us, mind you I left in '92, '91, I left and went to stay with him just the two of us and then my mom…*

She experienced a sense of loss of a stable family unit when her parents divorced. She further experienced a sense of loss when she found out that the father who raised her was not her biological father. She was angry with her mother for moving on and being in another relationship after the divorce.

> *Oh, he met someone, I mean she met someone, from 98 so she met someone. So, 2003, that of how can she fall pregnant while I am in grade 11? So, I hated her, I just hated her because, arg man I am grown up man you can come and tell me things. Why would you tell me that…ok I'd see there is someone and then, you*

understand, I'd see that there is someone between these people, but why don't you tell me. And then you are pregnant. I hated her.

Her parents' divorce was confusing to her. She did not understand why her stepfather disappeared from her life. His unavailability left a void in her life.

I maneuvered around the stress all alone, so uhm I started dating, I felt into that trap, I needed, because my dad was the best dad, the one that I knew him to be my dad, I still call him dad. So, I felt a void, no communication since after the divorce, they divorced 98, no communication whatsoever that guy just disappeared into thin air, no explanation, nothing, so that thing it confused me, it confused me a lot.

Hunadi exhibited externalising behaviour as a response to her father's "disappearance" and the ending of her parenting marriage. Generalised and externalising difficulties have been found in children of mothers who experienced childhood maltreatment (Plant et al., 2018) and in children whose parents divorced (Wallerstein et al., 2013). Although her stepfather was abusive, her perception of him as a good father did not change.

She was at [university name], so I was staying with him full-time, so he would care, when I say that guy…to a point where in 2003 I became shattered because never even once, even the slightest doubt, I have never felt or ever seen that this person is actually not my dad, though he was abusive to my mom, he has never laid a hand on me, he has never reprimanded me. When I say that I knew a dad I meant that guy.

Strained Mother-daughter Relationships

She consistently spoke about her complex relationship with her mother and the lack of maternal affection. She expressed how she felt that her mother hated her because of her

biological father, although she did not know her biological father. This perception of her mother influenced the complex relationship between them and Hunadi's self-perception. In the following quotes, she describes how she felt about her mother at different stages of her life.

> *Because that thing that you fell in love with someone, that someone broke your heart, yet my mom here she is, I felt she doesn't love me, she loves my younger brother more.*

> *So, eish [sic], I don't know if my mom, I don't know if she hates me, I don't know even today I just don't know. I once asked her, and she said it's impossible, but I feel that she hates me.*

> *My mom, when I would make mistakes at home, she would go a week without talking to me, while we stay in the same house.*

The comment below shows her self-awareness and how her mother's acts could be interpreted as love, such as paying for her school even now in her adulthood; however, her perspective is tainted by the lack of affection she received as a child.

> *I know I am not reading it out of perspective or what, but I feel that is what is there, she doesn't care as much as I care about her and she doesn't care much about me as she does the other two siblings, you see?*

Studies show that mothers who experienced childhood trauma can transmit impaired relational and affective states to their children (Bradfield, 2011; Plant et al., 2018), more so when the trauma is unresolved (lyengar et al., 2014). The attachment relationship between the mother and child can be the location of the child's own traumatic experience (Bradfield, 2011). Furthermore, maternal psychological distress can be a key pathway for the intergenerational transmission of childhood adversities (Plant et al., 2018). She felt she was unwanted and that

nothing she did could please her mother. She has ideal expectations of how a mother should be and her mother did not meet those expectations.

Her comparison of mothering practices between her and her mother indicated her efforts to mother differently from what she experienced. She expresses how much she loved her mother but felt that the love was not reciprocated. Plant et al., (2018) found that parenting practices were one of the mediating factors between a mothers' child maltreatment and her children's experience of psychopathology. Hostile and punitive parenting styles negatively affect children and adolescent's behavioural and emotional outcomes. Hunadi's family history suggests intergenerational strains in mother-daughter relationships as seen between her mother and grandmother.

Her grandmother took care of her while her mother was completing her studies; however, she did not offer support during her last pregnancy. This is similar to Hunadi's mother, who cared for her first child but did not offer support during her recent pregnancy. What is common here is the use of silent treatment to show disapproval of other's choices.

> *So, like even my mom, mind you she was staying in an apartment right, so, she moved home for maternity, but my grandmother didn't get involved, at all. The child would cry, it was me and my mom, it's me and my mom because she was sleeping in my room, so it was me and my mom, (clap hands) my grandmother would sleep the whole night, wake up in the morning, go to work, come back she'd greet the child, but she wasn't there at all. So, my mom decided to leave and go back to her place when my little sister was a month old, so she moved. So their relationship was not nice and were caught in the middle, remember I am a girl child, obviously I would hate my granny for doing that to her, it was painful, and they are grown up and I see, and it pained me, whatever that my*

mom would go through, it hurt me to a point where I was not afraid of confrontations at time, you see, I was not afraid of it.

According to her, love should not only be in actions but should be felt, and she has not felt her mother's love. The quote below also shows the silent treatment she received from her mother.

Because when a person loves you, you don't just have to see it, you have to feel it too, that this person genuinely loves me no matter my flaws. My mom, when I would make mistakes at home, she would go a week without talking to me, while we stay in the same house. As a mother, I am a mother now I cannot do, it is difficult for me to do.

Like her mother's experience with her grandmother, her mother also did not support her during her last pregnancy. She gave her the silent treatment as a sign of disapproval with her decision.

I went with my husband and when we got there, I confirmed that I was indeed pregnant. She was angry for the whole of June and July. Staying in the same house and she didn't talk to me. She wouldn't come to my room and we're staying in the same house. I did not see her; I would only hear her car coming in and out. She closed herself in her room, I am in my room because my pregnancy was painful, I couldn't, because I was close to giving birth in July. So the only thing I did was to sit and lay on bed. Only my children will come to my room. I never saw her. I saw her the day I was in labour, when I went to tell her told her that I am going to the hospital. That is when she asked, who am I going with.

She describes the silent treatment as something her mother is very good at.

Mind you, I have the children here, and schools are closed. My mom got angry because the children are here. Its lockdown, what would I use to go home, and lockdown closed. She was mad that I didn't bring them back, they were here March and April, went back home in May. So, she was mad, she was no longer speaking to me, like completely. You must know my mom she is very good in that department. She went all silent on me the entire lockdown, we did not talk to each other. So, it's fine.

In this way of showing disapproval and parental behaviour, Hunadi is conscious not to pass down the toxic patterns down to her children. She grew up observing a complex relationship between her mother and grandmother. While she was only a child and was not privy to anything more than what she observed among the older generation. Now as an adult, she has come to understand her mother's trauma. Hunadi speaks about how she came to be, and it seems that her mother's refusal of a relationship between Hunadi's parents, who were young and unmarried, created animosity between the older generation of mothers. Like her, her mother was raised in a family home, left in the care of other maternal figures, where she was mistreated. It seems that the pattern of guardianship family structures occurred in all three generations of mothers and was accompanied by childhood adversities.

Although Hunadi had a strained relationship with her mother, she expresses how she loved her mother, lived to seek her approval and wanted to protect her from her father's abuse.

Because all my life I lived to please my mother because I grew up not an open shell. I was closed up because everything I did was to please my mom, because I would see how my dad treated her. He was not perfect for her. I grew up with that thing that I want to always be around my mom, be close to my mother. But I felt like she was pushing me. But I was that kid who was overprotective of my

mother. I didn't want anything with my mother. But external forces came, and I don't know if that is how she is, or how she sees me because of my father, that she hates me, whether I was the one forcing myself on her, trying to fill…like to wipe her tears. I tried to be a perfect daughter.

She longed to heal and protect her mother from her own pain.

Maternal Identity

Hunadi's identity as a mother is intertwined with how she positions her own mother. Therefore, her identity is informed by her childhood adversities and her complex relationship with her mother and grandmother. At the heart of who she is as a mother lies the desire to be better than her mother.

My motherhood has made me to look into my childhood memories and try by all means to become what my mom wasn't to me and become a better version.[Reflection]

She compares herself as a mother to her own mother and compensates for what she did not experience in her childhood.

One thing that I know is that I am so different from my mom, like 100% different to my mom. I am very sensitive and like I care so, so much. My kids matter the most to me no matter the fact that the firstborn is not my husband's child, but I've never wanted them to feel that they are from different fathers.

She shares intensive mothering ideologies of sacrificing everything for a child, selflessness, physical and emotional presence, and unconditional love.

Motherhood means being a protector, a caring ever-present mother, present emotionally, and physically. Motherhood means being focused on my life and

not neglecting my kids. Motherhood means putting my kids needs first before mine, not only being a provider but also learning from my kids. It has shown me how blessed I am to be entrusted in taking care of precious souls and grooming them to become great loving, respectful, and kind people and one day becoming parents too to their kids. Motherhood had taught me how to say sorry and mean it. Motherhood has taught me how to be selfless and I love unconditionally at the same being a little hard. It has taught me patience and to accept that no matter the one womb they come from they can never be the same nor can I expect each of you them to be the same.[Reflection]

Her relationship with her children indicates a secure attachment and her efforts to be a better mother. She constantly compared herself to her mother and spoke about what she would not do as a mother as opposed to her own mother.

My mother's shouting you would feel like she is stabbing you in the heart. So, my shouting is that even my children are used to it, they say ai mom you like shouting. They are able to talk to me and express themselves. They always tell me that parents do not stay angry forever. We joke with each other. But my mother, even today we can't joke or sit down to tell her my issues, I can never do that. Because she has this thing of telling me that I am stupid repeatedly. She will even tell me that she can beat me up in front of my children, that I am not a woman. You see she doesn't respect me as a person, besides as her child, firstly as a person she doesn't respect me. So, I respect my kids and I respect that they are different, they are not the same. My first born is a journalist, when he comes home, he will tell you that this and that, he is tiring but I have accommodated him. But we sit and he would tell me things, we sit and joke. My kids can come into our room and sit on the bed, all four of us without their dad.

She consciously parents in a way that she wished her mother could have parented her. She sees herself as rectifying her mother's parenting mistakes.

> *So, I just believe that I am rectifying mistakes, you see. Imagine my mother never explained to me about periods, I found out by myself, and I was afraid to talk. It was a mess. My daughter is 10 [years old], I am starting to have this conversation with her because for them they start early so I am creating that room. I have started talking to her last year. I talked to her about boys.*
>
> *So, I am creating that thing. I know that I won't be perfect of course, even if I try to rectify my mother's mistakes, but I won't be perfect. But I am trying to be the best. I am always there for my kids.*

Although her children are also from different fathers, she is conscious not to make the children feel worthless or have confused identities. This is informed by her perception that her mother treated her and her siblings differently and according to their father's identities.

Conclusion

In this chapter I presented the findings from Hunadi's interview and reflective document. Hunadi's childhood was characterised by constant moving between her grandparents' home and her mother's home. However, she spent time in the care of her father who she discovered was her stepfather. Her father was abusive towards her mother, and she longed to protect her mother from his abuse. Her relationship with her mother was strained for much of her life and caused her great distress. As a mother she wished to parent differently than what she experienced in her childhood. She positioned herself as a better mother often comparing herself to her own mother.

Chapter 9: Hope's Story: A Search for Healing

Introduction

Hope is a 34-year-old woman mothering her sister's two children. She was raised in a two-parent home, although her parents were not married, they lived together until they separated when she was six years old. Her father then moved out of their home. Her mother was a working woman who supported her family financially. At the same time, she does not recall her father ever being formally employed. Her father left his job to avoid child maintenance. Hope grew up with a violent and jealous biological father who abused their mother. Her childhood was lovely and warm when her mother was a sole parent, assisted by her grandmother and aunt. Although they do not feature prominently in her narrative, her grandmother and aunt played a role in giving her a stable childhood. She and her sister faced rejection from their biological father's side of the family.

Primary Analytical Themes

Trauma Narrative

Hope was exposed to various adversities in her childhood, including domestic violence, the separation of her parents, rejection from her father's family, and divorce. All these occurrences affected her life in various stages, including motherhood.

Domestic violence. Hope witnessed domestic violence within the family where her father was abusive towards her mother, and the siblings were indirectly subjected to violent and abusive behaviours. Her narrative details the deep emotional scars of witnessing domestic violence. The quote below indicates her father's behaviour and her personal relationship with her father as a child, which made her oblivious to what was happening in her home.

> *So, my father, my biological father, he was a violent person. Although I was, I was, I grew up as a daddy's girl. So, there was a point where I didn't want to*

believe it. But I think it was around five or six, when I started understanding what's going.

In an earlier comment in the interview (see below), she describes her childhood as being warm and lovely and full of happy times. Although domestic violence occurred in the house, her personal experience of the home was different until she could understand what had been happening.

But it was really warm. I mean, even when my biological father was around, it was happy times. We never really lacked. But we lacked, we didn't feel it.

Although not indicated, her older sister could have been more exposed to her violence than she was because of her age. It also seems she was protected from witnessing the violence.

Yeah, five or six. It was so evident that my mother had tape recorders under the couches, because whenever she would go file for protection order, or lay a charge, or whatever, because my father was known in the area, so they would never take her seriously. So, I think for me the last major thing that stuck in my mind was when he beat her so much that my older sister locked me in the room and then she ran to get help. And I was like, literally just I was forcing my head on the window, just to get out so that I can go and ask for help too. But my mother was beating so much. Yeah, my father was a very jealous man.

Parental separation and divorce. After her parents separated, she experienced identity issues and tried to reconnect with her father; however, the relationship was tainted. The peace for mothers and children after a divorce or separation depends on multiple factors, including the relationship between the divorced parents and the new husband if a mother remarries (Wallerstein et al., 2013). Hope's parents lived in conflict even after their separation when her mother remarried. Her father hounded her mother even when he was also married.

So, the conversation does not go anywhere really. It's like, no, your mom didn't want me to, so I decided to give her space and when she got married, I decided to give more space. Which is funny because even when my mother was married, he would hound her. He would call her, him and the wife would you know sort of call her, prank call her in the evening then just swear and do all these things, so yeah.

Hope's mother remarried, and she and her children adjusted to the new life. She mentions the various ways her mother tried to escape her biological father.

She got protection orders. She ran away with us. At some point, I felt like she got married also for protection. She needed somebody to save her. And my stepdad was able to for few years. So yeah, I think yeah, I somewhat think that was a strategy to say, okay, because I'm struggling alone, because I mean, my father would come randomly.

Her father interfered in their mother's new marriage although she does not mention any resulting conflicts between her mother and stepfather. Her mother and stepfather's marriage ended in a divorce, which changed their lives. Hope's identity struggle when her parents separated could also be because of her relationship with her father before the separation.

Yes, now we do. Yeah, it went quiet for, oh, for a number of years from like six until I was probably 17 when I had like identity issues. Came back, tried to connect with him. But then I realised, I also saw the things that my mother would tell us about him. To say just be careful, you know, there's lies in between, there's this and that. So, then I realised that, no man, this man is not very truthful, then I just distanced myself until I think my late 20s. So that was when in varsity.

Rejection. Hope felt that her father had rejected her and her sister. Similarly, they were openly rejected by her father's family of origin.

> *But yeah, we, they, they rejected us openly, freely so, they rejected us from as children. So, we knew that we were never wanted there. When we went it was, we had full knowledge that we will not [be] welcomed.*

She is disappointed that her father did not fight for them after the separation or that he did not make contact. She feels that her father shifts the blame to her mother and that he could have made more efforts to stay in contact with them.

> *So even with, you know why he, when my mom, when him and my mom separated, why didn't he fight? Why didn't he come looking for us? Why did he just decide to walk away? I mean, those are the questions that we asked. And he just said, well, your mom didn't want me to. And we said but what did you do? You know, what did you try to do? You knew where you were, you could have stretched yourself a little bit. And he keeps blaming my mother. So, the conversation does not go anywhere really. It's like, no, your mom didn't want me to, so I decided to give her space and when she got married, I decided to give more space.*

She fears that her children may experience the same rejection she experienced in her childhood.

> *Being rejected, I mean… we were rejected right, we were rejected, and they were also rejected by their fathers both of them, by their fathers. So, for me it's, I try to close the gap. At first it seemed like it was closing, but now, it's not.*

Childhood Trauma: Long-term Emotional Consequences

Hope's narrative revealed the profound impact of witnessing her mother's emotional distress and her diminished joy. It also shows the effect on the different members of the family particularly focusing on the effect on Hope's life. According to her, she had to mature at a young age, which took away her childhood.

> *Yes, I also need to be a child at some point. I think with trying to go to school and staying in the high school that I went to and staying in varsity and finishing, I couldn't do much of childhood stuff, you know I had to mature a lot quicker, I had to make long term decisions as a child to say this is the life I don't want so let me work hard to avoid you know being, I hate poverty, I loathe poverty, so even now I don't mind working three jobs as long as I don't have to go back to any townships, I don't care which one it is. I don't want to go back to any townships [sic]so I'd rather hold up like 10 jobs.*

The quote above also shows how financial struggle made her ambitious. She is willing to do what it takes to avoid poverty and a life of struggle.

One of the impacts on her mother is the resentment towards their father.

> *she feels a bit shameful. She resents my father, she resents him like she hates the thought or the name or the idea of my father that much. So of course, when you grow older, you want to ask certain questions to say you know memories that I have are the true?*

Her mother carried the shame of the domestic violence in her home. However, her mother also showed resilience in how she returned to her community and give her children some normalcy amidst her divorce.

She did! Yo [sic] my mom defended herself. I think if she had done more than what she did, she would have died. She fought and she managed to keep her head up. I mean, after her divorce, we had to go back to the same house where she was being abused in the same community where she was abused. She had to face those people again you know now as an older woman, but she had to face them again.

According to her, her mother developed aggression and is easily triggered because of the abuse she experienced.

So yeah she fought and she's quite aggressive as well. My mom is yo [sic] my mom is aggressive. The smallest of things sets her off. She's a beautiful woman, but dare you just, I don't know just these triggers. Yeah, especially if you will question a simple thing if you'd question her back on a simple thing, like, why did you choose this wood? She would get so crazy, because those are the things that she would get beaten for. Why did you buy this table? Why didn't you give me money? She would be beaten for you know, why did you buy kids Christmas clothes? Where did you get the money?

Hope and her sister lived in the fear of being rejected, which she also connected to why she protects the children from their own father's rejection.

So, because of that we were even afraid to relate to him in a father-daughter manner. We struggled to call him dad for a while, for years. You know, even now, in our old age, we struggle to call him dad because we always felt like he might just decide to reject us or whatever. So, but oh, man, he's…they're so different.

One of the most significant ways in which the trauma has affected Hope is in how she relates with men.

> *Huu, it's a lot, because, I mean, a simple thing, how I relate to men. The moment a man will just raise a voice for me it's a fight or flight moment. Not mattering whether it's a partner, or whatever. You know the minute the voice goes up, there's a certain pitch, then yeah no that sends me off.*

She fears being in romantic relationships and is hyperalert when dealing with men in dating relationships although she wishes to be married.

> *Yeah, no, no, it's such a thorn in my flesh. It's a thorn in my flesh. Because I don't date a lot. I don't date a lot. The moment I see… literally everything is a red flag. Every single thing is red flag. It doesn't even have to be violent. But a simple thing like when a person would say, I'm busy, I can't see you. For me, then it translate* [sic] *as, there is problems, is there another person, am I the other women. You know, like it affects it. I'm afraid of men but equally so I'm not afraid of men. Like yeah its weird, I don't know how to explain it, but I'm afraid of men. I'm afraid of dating them, in there is walls.*

She is hyper alert and aggressive as a defence against possible threats from males.

> *But if I had to fight and defend myself, I would not hold back. So, it… I've realised that I'm, I've got this aggression towards men. Because I always feel like I need to defend myself. So, it's and I've also said to my mom that you know you're asking me when am I going to get married, when am I having children, but we haven't dealt with the bigger issue here.*

She wanted to be married and does not want to have children of her own, although she says that not wanting children is not related to her trauma.

You know I want to get married, I love the idea of marriage, like I want to love somebody and that somebody would love me back, especially now at this point of my life, I am like I have done for everybody and now I need to look out, you know like a, I am starting to raise my head to say okay I want to have somebody I can talk to outside my family, so too much I have literally placed everything on family. So now it's time for me to branch out and I would love to get married, but I don't want children, biological children, I don't.

The recurring trigger of past trauma highlights the ongoing battle with these emotional consequences. Hope has a level of self-consciousness and the ability to reflect on how her childhood has affected her life and the adult she is now. She is also able to see the impact on other members of her family.

Collective Parenting

The value of collectivism and being responsible for a family is common in her family. In her childhood, Hope's grandmother and aunt stepped in to assist her mother in raising the children. This collective mothering shaped Hope's communal family values.

I think my grandmother played a huge role in that because, for the most part, or the parts that mattered is when my mother was just the sole parent. That's when I got to experience her, you know, challenges and everything so and then realizing now my grandmother and my aunt stepped in to also assist. I think that also just shaped my communal aspect of you know, a family. It's not just the immediate people but as siblings, we need to step in and help…

The same pattern of collectivism is evident in her deciding to co-parent with her sister and how she takes care of her family. Her co-parenting with her sister shows the collective forms of parenting in her family. She describes this decision below.

So right now, my setup, I stay with my oldest sister, and my nephews. It's been like that for a while. So since birth, I've been hands on with them. I am practically co-parenting with my sister because their fathers are not around. So we are a close knit family, close nit. So it came naturally for me to just step in and make sure that they've got the best, because my oldest sister is not working. So, yeah, I'm actually the only one that's working. My mom just recently retired. So, I take care of the family.

She felt responsible for her sister's children and for exposing them to a particular way of life.

yeah and I realised that I also, maybe I felt like my sister was incapable, maybe because I didn't like how she directed her life, which was also wrong from my part, but I was like let me take the kid, at first it was one, let me take this kid you know and show him this way and steer him towards that and maybe you will grow up to be like a good member of you know...

While Hope grew up in a matriarchal family structure in her home, and values it, she fears that her foster children lack a consistent male figure.

I am fearful for them because its boys growing up in our female home, so they are lacking, you can that they are lacking the male influence, you can just tell.

Furthermore, there are conflicting parenting approaches that may affect children. Although she did not give details of the parenting between her mother, her grandmother and aunt, she reflects on her parenting style compared to her sister's.

There is a difference, there is a difference, I am strict, my sister is, aggressively strict. Like she believes in hitting, I can't hit, like I can hit but like I don't know

you need to take me over the edge for me to hit. […]. whereas she believes in "spare the rod, spoil the to the child". So for me it's like let's talk about it, there is something behind, you know, behaviour.

The meaning of motherhood

When asked how she would describe a good mother, she gave the following response.

sure, somebody who is present, yet not overbearing. Somebody who allows you to make mistakes but is there to support where you know should fall the person will be there. […]. shoo great mom, just somebody being present, I think for me presence is everything, we can have everything or nothing, as long as there is presence, and before I thought it was all about provision but I realised that with kids, there know provision because, we draw them you know I can buy you this, or I can take you there, but they are content with just having somebody there and just loving them, whichever way love looks like, because you can just see when they are just playing,

She considered her sister to be a good mother because of her love for her children, who is present and works to provide for them in the absence of their fathers.

yeah she's…she loves her kids, she loves them. The way she just protects them too, like even when with their…in their fathers' absence, she's there, she fends, she tries as much as possible to give them the little she can, so […] and that makes her a great mom. She's got so much love, I just wish she knew how to direct the love yeah, and in a way that tomorrow it won't seem like it was harmful to the kids because I just wonder if they had to translate it, what would they say…

She sees herself as a protective and present mother who wants to be there for every event in the children's lives. She wants to shield her children from experiencing the same hardships and suffering she went through, reflecting her commitment to ensuring their well-being and happiness.

> *But I do not want them to turn out like us, I don't want them to be afraid of human relations, I don't want to project my life on them although I think I am already doing that so far. So yeah we going to start counselling soon, therapy for all of us.*

Hope fears projecting her life and trauma onto the children, which might affect them negatively. Her combination of authoritarian and authoritative parenting styles is linked to her identity as a mother and the need to protect her children.

> *I am quite strict; I am quite strict. I helicopter because I think I'm very fearful. There are elements of fear, I fear for them, I fear. I want them closest to me.*

She is a strict parent but does not believe in physical punishment. She expresses love, affection, and empathy towards their children while also being strict and anxious about what might happen to them. She describes herself as having cared for the needs of others and restricting her own needs, and neglecting caring for herself. She saw this self-sacrifice from her mother and follows the same pattern in terms of caring for her family.

The birth of her first nephew gave her new meaning to life. According to her, the child pushed her to work hard and provide a better life for them.

> *ah man, I love them, I adore them, I adore them. So, ah they unfortunately, the first one he was a blessing I mean we'd been, I think we were waiting for him. So when he came, I think he pushed, I can only speak for myself right, so he pushed me to just strive for more and just give him the best, and so that's exactly*

what I did. I made sure that you know I put myself in spaces where there is opportunities to flourish and yeah I try by all means to expose them to as much as possible because I have realised what exposure can do to a person. I am fearful for them because its boys growing up in our female home, so they are lacking, you can that they are lacking the male influence, you can just tell.

Although she places great value on the role of a mother, she is of the view that the children may be deprived of male influence which they need.

Intergenerational Cycles of Trauma

Hope's father experienced adversities in his childhood and was treated differently from his siblings because of his father.

The reason, we found out recently, I think, last two years ago or something, it's because the man he thought was his father was not his father. So, he was always he was always treated differently from the other siblings […]

He discovered that the man who raised him was not his biological father. This led to conflicts between him and his mother.

As he says. He had a good relationship with the mother. But it was also… there was a lot of conflicts. When he found out that his father was not his biological father, then the conflict escalated even more, because she wouldn't say who his real father was. So, I think it's always a dynamic of, you know, Father, Father, biological father, stepdad, whatever. And it also now became our story.

She acknowledges the cycles of family dynamics, including biological and stepfathers, as a pattern inherited from her father's family. The dynamic between her father and

grandmother is seen as the reason they were rejected and why her father was a jealous and angry man.

> *And I'm trying to stop that, because it seems like it's a generational thing. But yeah, he had a good relationship with the mom. His stepdad passed away. I don't know my paternal grandfather. But they didn't have sort of a good relationship. And I think that's after he found out of that he's not my father, then things apparently making sense to say he was treated differently from the other kids and whatever else, so I think maybe that could be the reason. That's what he says is the reason.*

Although she is conscious not to project her traumatic experiences onto the children, the traumatic memories may be indirectly communicated through other mechanisms (Bradfield, 2011). The remnants of her mother's experiences and their effects on Hope's life perspective shows the traumatic process within their attachment relationship (Bradfield, 2011). Patterns of aggression are evident in the family; however, Hope makes conscious efforts to stop the cycle of abuse. She also tries to prevent the transmission of trauma and harmful behaviours to the next generation. She expresses the generational effects of trauma in her family in the quotes below.

> *Being rejected, I mean… we were rejected right, we were rejected, and they were also rejected by their fathers both of them, by their fathers. So for me it's, I try to close the gap. At first it seemed like it was closing, but now, it's not. So seeing them coming out of their shells and each and every one of them it's just, you can see the traces of their fathers on each of them separately and my fear is I am going to live it out soon, because now they are asking, they asking and I don't know what to tell them.*

She tries to protect the children from the effects of rejection from their fathers. In addition, she tries to protect the children and other siblings from narratives of her childhood trauma to preserve their perception of their father.

> *And then I also tread carefully not to sort of expose her to what we were exposed to, you know, for her own protection, because its ugly. Even with my younger sister from my mom, so from my mom there is three, then from my biological father there is two. You know, plus my, my oldest sister and I, so it's like four from my biological father. So, the younger sibling from my mom, she doesn't know what happened. She might have heard, but she doesn't know. So, we also just try to protect her from all of that. Because her father's, her father is like, the best man. You know, so.*

She expresses her need for therapy and other ways of taking care of her mental well-being. At the time of the interview, she was in the process of seeking counselling services for her family to heal from the past and break the intergenerational transmission of trauma.

Protective Factors: Education, Religion, and Social fatherhood

Education. Education and exposure to good schooling environments played a significant role in Hope's upbringing and later life outcomes. They were exposed to good schools, as she mentions.

> *...we did not have everything, but we were not made to feel that we didn't have. Because our mother just kept us close to her and provided the best. I mean we went to good schools, we went to really good schools.*

She explains that her education was the only thing she had when her mother divorced and moved back to the township.

Yes, we moved back. I was older, I was in high school. My sister my older sister and I we were in high school, my youngest was still in primary, primary grade R somewhere there. Yeah, it was hard. It was hard because then my mom left with two kids now she's coming back with three. We had nothing, uhm we had nothing but great schools to go to.

She made sure she worked hard not to live in poverty, although she sees this time of hard work as something that took away her childhood.

All I saw was poverty, jealousy, turmoil, everything that said you need to get out of here. That's all that I saw. Listen I made sure that I worked hard, I made sure that I worked hard but yeah looking back it was not a pleasant thing to go back, but it needed to be done…

Hope credits her books and the church for helping her to cope with the turmoil in her home.

We haven't dealt with the whys and the how's and so I fortunately for me, I hide all of that in my books and i hide behind church, and just giving back and hoping that you know by just being a good person, some of these things won't affect me. But they've, they've seeped into all of that.

Hope functioned well in academics and spirituality and exhibited distress related to intimate relationships (Cook et al., 2005). She viewed education as the only way for her to escape poverty and the church to avert the reality of her traumatic childhood.

Religion. Religion and education were mainly associated with her stepfather's role as an academic and a pastor. In the quote above, she mentions how she hides herself within the church as a way to cope with her challenges.

Social father. Hope's stepfather played an important role in their lives, providing a good life and loving them like his own children.

> *And my stepdad [exclamation],man education plays a huge role in all of that. My stepdad is educated, he is, you know, like an upstanding man in the community. He is what you would look for in a role model, you know. He had his faults, but never violent, ever. Never! He just represented love for us, you know, and when he came, because we would pray for like a man that would love for us, you know. And when he came, my God, he loved us. He, he showed us a fatherly love that we were never exposed to.*

Interestingly her stepfather continued to play a social father role and paid for her university, although he was divorced from their mother. He assisted by paying her fees and ensuring that she settled into university.

> *So again I had to be resourceful and I called my stepdad and at that time they were peaking in their…I think it was divorce. Yeah they were divorced officially, but there was still tension. So, I called my stepdad and he was also not providing in any form or fashion. So I called my stepdad and I'm like listen I want to go to varsity and that man loved us man, he was like its fine I'll pay, just find what you want to do, give me a whole break down then we'll do it. My mom was shocked.*

Conclusion

In this chapter I presented Hope's story. Hope's mother experienced physical abuse, which left her and her children with emotional scars. The consequences of the trauma included a life of fear, aggression, and resentment. Her mother featured prominently in her narrative and showed great resilience through her separation from their father and a divorce from their

stepfather. Although the trauma had adverse effects on Hope and her family, protective factors helped them cope and escape their struggles.

Chapter 10: Khanyi's Story: Growing Up Too Soon

Introduction

Khanyi is a 44-year-old divorced mother of two children. At the time of the interview, she was unemployed and had moved back home to live with her mother. Her children are older and learning independence. She is the first of four sisters, and her parents are divorced. In her childhood, she moved frequently and took on a lot of responsibility for her younger sisters. However, she was also a naughty child and used to be punished by her father for her behaviour. She remembers events where she was expected to act like a responsible person in her childhood and when she received a beating for not being responsible. She experienced sexual abuse from multiple family members but felt unable to speak out due to fear and shame.

Primary Analytical Themes

Trauma Narrative and Self-silencing

Khanyi narrated her story with tears as she remembers the challenges she experienced as a child and the scars she has carried throughout her life. She states the unpleasant memories from her childhood.

> *Shuu, most of my memorable events are not happy memories. They are not happy memories at all.*

Growing up too soon. Khanyi was expected to fit into a parenting role when she was still young. She feels that her childhood was cut short because she had to quickly learn to be responsible and care for her siblings.

I couldn't wait to grow up and be independent and move out of home because I had to be the responsible one because I'm the eldest of four girls so uhm I was very naughty. [Reflection]

While her parents were working, she had to take care of her siblings, and she sees herself as having been an active parent.

So yeah, as the eldest, I had a lot of responsibilities taking care of my sisters, and when my mom used to…will be at work. So, I think just my childhood, umm yes was spent being an active parent more than anything. I went through a lot just, mhmm you want to make me emotional; I see you.

This role led her to rebel and act out to receive attention as a child.

I was very naughty growing up and I used to get beaten up a lot especially by my father and I think now when I reflect on that its maybe I wanted attention. There are moments where I wanted to be a child like other children, but I couldn't because I had to look after my sisters and be responsible. So, in order to catch up, maybe, because most of my childhood I think I was very naughty even in high school I was naughty, banking school, getting drunk and all of that so uhm I was an attention seeker, if you can put it that way.[Reflection]

When asked about her current relationship with her mother, her response shows she could have resented her mother for the responsibilities she had to take on in her childhood. Their relationship has become better in her adulthood.

Ah, I stay with her so I think, I think that our relationship is good. We've had our moments because especially when I grew up, because of all the responsibility that was on me, I became rebellious that I'm the one taking care of my sisters, I cannot have a healthy childhood. You know, I cannot go out

and play with my friends, so I developed that thing of… our relationship was not perfect, but right now I think it's OK, it's actually good.

Child abuse. Khanyi experienced physical abuse and sexual abuse in her family. Although she mentions that both her parents used corporal punishment, she mentioned extreme forms from her father.

So that was me. Umm…So umm, high school? High school was fine. I had the year when I had to repeat because oh of a lot of things, I guess. Umm, how my father used to make me feel. He used to beat me up, he beat me in a way that he beat me with the knuckle of a belt, kicking me, all of that made me not to have high self-esteem.

In the quote below she described the violation she experienced from her family.

Yeah, I went through a lot in my childhood. Uh. How can I put it? I was sexually violated by my father's family. And it was not just one person, it was multiple people. There was actually 3, because my…our parents used to fight a lot. And there was a time when I would stay at my father's home in [mentions place], that is when all this thing used to happen.

Domestic violence. Khanyi witnessed domestic violence between her parents.

And it was not just one person, it was multiple people. There was actually 3, because my…our parents used to fight a lot. And there was a time when I would stay at my father's home in Keilani, that is when all this thing used to happen.

She later experienced domestic violence and infidelity in her own marriage. She also witnessed her father's infidelity and that influenced her self-perception and how she perceived marriage.

> *And I experienced my father cheating on my mother, and it happened to me as well. Like my kids have a sibling who's younger than them and, and while I was still married. So, they are similar.*
>
> *I didn't date a lot and in date a lot. I can't say holy that maybe the other relationships were like that. I don't think they were but the one that was abusive was the one when I was married into.*

The abuse and neglect Khanyi experienced at home affected her academically. She silenced her pain and internalized the abuse, which caused her distress.

> *I repeated at school, I just became to myself that its better if this, whatever happened to me I keep it to myself and not impose on other people or make it another person's responsibility. So yeah, I carried a lot of hurt around.*

Silencing. Abuse that occurs within the family home is often kept silent, and Khanyi silenced her pain and her trauma. She could not open up to her parents about the sexual abuse she experienced.

> *And yeah, I was made to feel that its normal. You know, it was that sense that there is nothing wrong or after it happened when you realise what just happened, you like oh, I cannot speak out now because it has happened. It will be a matter of why didn't you speak out when it happened so I grew with that sense of being a responsible girl who wanted to take care of the family, and neglected myself in a way I am, and that made me become an empath, I think*

that I would give what I have to the next person, irregardless [sic] of whether I have it or not.

Her sense of responsibility made her think of others and silences her own pain. She felt she did not have a voice and that her voice did not matter. This affected her self-confidence and positively affected her parenting.

And also, I never, my mom was very strict, my parents, both my parents were very strict and I could not voice out how I feel. There was never that democracy in the home so you are a child, you remain a child, you must just be seen and not heard. So, with my kids most of the time I would encourage them to be outspoken, to see how they feel.[Reflection]

According to her, she protected a personality that attracted an abusive partner and maintained her self-perception of worthlessness. She was aware of the effect of her childhood trauma on her relationship. She struggles with feelings of worthlessness and low self-esteem, which she started working on to improve after her divorce.

Intergenerational Cycles of Abuse

Khanyi draws similarities between her mother's experience in marriage and her own experiences. As indicated above, she witnessed her father's infidelity and experienced the same in her own marriage.

Yes, yes, there's, there's a lot of similarities. There's a lot of similarities because the same things that I went through, its things that my mother went through, you know, you are made to feel that your voice doesn't matter. You made to feel that you don't matter as a human being and you need to do what I

say, not what I do type of thing. And I experienced my father cheating on my mother, and it happened to me as well.

She also stayed in an abusive marriage perpetuating the cycle of intimate partner violence. The trauma from her childhood resulted in feelings of worthlessness even in her marriage.

And it took me a long time for me to decide to leave the marriage because of what was happening. And yeah, I think my childhood it impacted on the marriage, the type of marriage that I had because I was made to feel worthless because that is how I think that is how I projected myself because of my childhood, because of how I grew up, I never thought I was with anything. I never thought I could speak out and people would listen to me.

The above quote shows the continuation of abuse in Khanyi's narrative. She experienced neglect and emotional distress when she was pregnant, and her husband was not present.

But you know, you settle on the thing of no it'll get better, you know he will change. Yeah, I remember I was not well, I was sick actually, like, physically sick that I had to give birth to my son early. That's how sick I was because I was constantly crying. I was just in a state of neglect and jah so it was different in that way of I had already experienced his bad side, but I still didn't leave and uh yeah my second child was in ICU for two weeks because I was not well during the pregnancy as well. So, where it was totally different.

As a child, she wanted to escape the abusive environment she grew up in and to be independent. The thoughts of one day escaping the abuse in her home gave her a sense of hope.

Uh. In my childhood years, I thought, if I can just grow up and get a job and move out of home, you know, I held on to that, if I can just get that to that point where I'm not subjected to any form of abuse and then I can just move out and get my own place and get a job and start my own life that I would be OK. I think uh, that is what I held on to that hope that it won't stay like this.

Although these cycles of abuse were evident in Khanyi's life, she was conscious to break the cycle and to protect her children from abuse. She feels that she is putting her children through what she went through as a child in terms of having to take care of others and maturing earlier. However, these feelings could stem from her current situation and the financial position she is in.

So right now I'm thinking that if maybe I can find myself in a better position financially. Maybe I'll get to that point where I can forgive myself, but right now it's a struggle. It's a struggle. I can't. It cannot.

Although there are cycles of abuse in her narrative, she tries to break the cycles by parenting differently. She encourages her children differently and encourages them to express themselves.

So, with my kids most of the time I would encourage them to be outspoken, to see how they feel. Yes, most of the time I would be offended if they tell me the truth, but at the end of the day I would yeah, understand that it's a good thing for them to be outspoken and not to close off like I did because it comes back, and it affects you in other ways and in other things. I could not stand up for myself when I was abused because of how I grew up. I could not uhmm, I did not learn the skill of loving myself and putting myself first. I always had to

compromise for my sisters, compromise my joy and my happiness for others. So, I tried my best not to instil that in my children.

The Meaning of Motherhood

Khanyi finds meaning in being a mother and her definition of motherhood is largely informed by her childhood. She described what motherhood means to her.

> *I would say that motherhood means that a mother should be available emotionally, be available for the kids financially and just be present in everything that the kids go through and give them love in everything that I did not receive as I child, Things that I wish I had as a child. So, that's what I think motherhood means to me. [Reflection]*

She views motherhood in terms of one's ability to provide. Because of her childhood struggles, she wanted to give her children a different experience. She did this mainly by overcompensating for her absence with material things. However, she must reconstruct what motherhood means since she is currently unable to provide materially for her children.

> *Yhoo, when it comes to motherhood, I think it's very tricky. It's tricky because my understanding of a mother is to be a present mother, not only physically but also to cater for the needs of my children that they don't lack anything whilst I'm still alive and are able to do what I can for them. I think purely because I was, most of the time I was away, and then when I came back from work, I would bring them something or we would go out, you know. And I would buy them something just to make up for that lost time.*

And now that I cannot do anything for them now and they are used to this lifestyle where they used to get everything. There are times when I feel that I failed them as a parent that I cannot uphold that lifestyle that they had.

Her experiences of parenting in her family informed how she parents her children by giving them what they want materially and being present for the important things. She compensates for her own childhood and not being raised how she would have wanted to. Motherhood to her also means protecting children from trauma as well as creating an ideal family environment for them.

I love families, so I wouldn't want to get a divorce or be a single parent and deprive my kids of having both parents present, even though the other parent was not meeting the criteria, so to speak, or whatever, but it was that thing of…Umm, it's better to be married.

Her parenting and construction of motherhood are forms of repairing her own childhood and fulfilling her needs. Khanyi's identity as a mother is characterised by her ability to provide for her children. However, she has used material provisions to compensate for being a working mother in the past and to shield her children from the abuse in her home.

Coping and Resilience: Attempts at Healing

Khanyi's family, friends, and religious community are a form of social support that has assisted her in her healing journey. While she has not sought professional help because of financial constraints, she reflects on her need for psychological services.

I'm, I'm reading a lot like right now there's a friend of mine that goes to a psychologist, so every time she come back from the psychologist she would share because she had difficulties in their marriage. So, she would share

about the, the experience, the session that they had, and I would do my research because now it's that at the moment I cannot afford to see anyone professional, so I'll do my own research.

Yeah, I think that I need that [a psychologist]. I, I really do need that it's just that I know these sessions are expensive because the friend I was taking to you about, she pays like a 1000 rands per session, and I think her medical aid is paying or something. I don't even have medical aid. I don't even have money to pay for those sessions, so that is why I haven't been seeing anyone, but I wouldn't mind if there's somebody who am I can talk to.

She uses self-help and psychoeducational resources to find helpful information. She and her children live with her mother, who provides support and motivation. Her religion is also a source of spiritual upliftment and a coping mechanism. Khanyi's narrative shows her resilience as she restarts her life after marriage and works on healing after divorce.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented Khanyi's story showing her childhood experiences and her construction of motherhood. Khanyi experienced various adversities in her childhood, including the expectation to care for her siblings and quickly learn responsibility, neglect, and being sexually and physically abused. Her narrative shows the meaning she ascribes to motherhood and how her childhood trauma shaped her maternal identity. Her current circumstances as an adult also shaped some of her views and contentions with motherhood. There are cycles of abuse in her family, but she is working on breaking those cycles by parenting differently.

Chapter 11: Matsie's Story: An Inherited Way of Life

Introduction

Matsie is a professional woman, a wife, and mother of three children. She is the last born to her parents. She was raised in a two-parent home with her elder sister, although she had other siblings who were older and out of the home. Her father worked away from home and came home over the weekends; however, he dominated the home with his strict nature. Her childhood is centred around her father and his teachings. She recalls her strict father's teachings and her mother's financial habits, which she applied in her adult life. Discussing her strict parenting style causes her emotional discomfort as she connects her parenting style to her father. Her trauma relates to strict parenting and constant fear as a child.

Primary Analytical Themes

Trauma Narrative: A Struggle to Break Free from Strict Parenting.

Matsie experienced overly strict parenting, which affected her psychologically. She was an anxious child and often fearful of her father.

> *The first thought of my childhood is surrounded by my father and his teachings. His strict nature ensured that he dominates mostly. As hard as some of them were, I constantly go back to them in my parenting journey. [Reflection]*

Her father was feared even in the community. As a child she was fearful and always anticipated her father's reaction or discipline.

> *So yeah, it was just a normal childhood. I know you touched on, on, on violence within families. I, I don't want to lie. And my father was very, very strict and ey I don't want to say ruthless, but he was that type of a guy who was feared amongst the community. Eh…but to us, even, even, even to us, we feared him*

like he was that type of a guy who like I would be, I wasn't your normal child who played in the streets because of how strict my father was. So, from, but generally with me even my character I am that person even when I come back from work I just stay home.

The strict parenting affected her sociability although she thinks this is her personality trait. It seems that the memories of her being a loner cause her distress.

Um, so yeah, I think, I guess that's where I developed my character of being a loner. Now I'm. I'm getting emotional talking about these things. And yeah, so, but I wasn't forced. I think because I was scared of uhmm well, I wouldn't say my dad said don't do it, but I could pick up from him because he was just a strict person that he was not so excited to see me playing with other kids. He was just paranoid and, you know, the weird thing is that even now myself as, as a as a mother I see myself on my father [crying]. I'm just too hard on my children, especially my girl children. When we visit home, I don't even allow them to get out of the house.

She seems conflicted by how she views her father and the impact of his strictness on her. She narrates an incident where she expected punishment from her father.

I remember one day I had broken, I don't even want to say I had broken it, but for some reason there was an electrical shock on his radio, his favourite radio. And it makes a very big sound, you know electrical things. And I, I, I didn't do anything, I was really innocent, but because I was standing next to it oh. My mind started running to say yho what will my father do to me. So, I stood there, and I started crying so that loud bang from the radio also scared me. And now I took away from that being scared because of the bang and I just screamed. So,

when they came, they were more concerned about me screaming than the radio. But at the time I was trying to say, you know what, please don't beat me up [laugher].

Matsie has not witnessed her father being abusive towards her mother, although the children received beatings.

But I would be lying if I say I've seen him beating up my mother. But beating us up? Definitely.

Her narrative showed her struggle to break free from her father's strict nature, which she thinks she seems to have inherited.

So no, the one upbringing I remember is between myself and my sister, who has four years older, so I think the, the, the character for me really took shape from my own experience, not observing how they were treated. So, I guess it's, it's confirmation that he was even strict on me because here I am. Um, I wouldn't say genes. Maybe it is genes that it runs in our family, that we are just strict and too paranoid.

She struggles to articulate the effect of her father's strict nature on her. She somehow only associates this perspective of her father with what her siblings share with her. However, she also admits that she might have experienced this extremely strict parenting, which might explain her own parenting. She agrees with this type of parenting now as an adult.

So, I see my father in me a lot. Uhm and funny thing is I don't know, I guess I understand him because I, I'm him now. So, I don't see the, the, the, the, the heavy hand that he had as heavy hand because it's the same heavy hand that I have. Yeah so, amongst my siblings, I think I'm the only one who think my dad was normal [crying]

However, she is aware of how her children are affected negatively by how she mothers them. Consistent with her own upbringing, Matsie is hard on her children and does not want them to interact with other people. However, she seems conflicted by adopting her father's strict parenting style, which she once identified as being too harsh.

Repetitive behaviours are a common characteristic related to childhood trauma that seem to last for long periods of life (de Young et al., 2011; Terr, 1995). This may occur even if the traumatised individual receives a psychological diagnosis or not. Matsie's overcontrolled behaviour may be due to the enactment of aspects of her traumatic experience with authority (Cook et al., 2005). Terr (1995) asserts that the survivor of childhood trauma may not be aware that their behaviours and physical responses repeat some aspect of the original set of thoughts or emergency responses. It seems difficult for Matsie to link her withdrawn character with her father's parenting style and how this affects her socially. In line with Terr's (1995) assertions, Matsie's behavioural enactments of her trauma response recurred so often that it became a distinct personality trait. Her consistent explanation of her current behaviour as a type of biological trait and not because of socialisation may be because of her admiration for her father and the struggle to associate his parenting with negative outcomes.

The Role of Family Structure

Although Matsie was raised in a nuclear family, she believes that she fears leaving her children in the care of others, including her own family. She mentioned how her siblings moved around and were raised by grandparents, and she was blessed to have been raised by her parents. Asked if she thinks moving around in childhood destabilises children, she responded this way.

> *Yeah, I think so. I think so, which ehh why I, I tried to, to, to make sure that my children don't get to experience that. None of my children was raised by my, my*

mother or my husband's family. I raised all my children. I never took my any of my children back home.

She, therefore, ensured that she raised her own children and did not rely on extended family. This approach to parenting is informed by her memories from other family members rather than her personal experiences. Her narrative shows a pattern of guardianship family structures in children who grow up with grandparents.

So yeah, and then also the moving around you see that children will grow up living with grandparents. The stories that they, the horror stories that they told me. I think those are the things that shaped my thoughts really to say but this is not a good experience, because they will be sharing those stories of them not being given something, the granny was prioritising the aunt's children over them. A parent who has money their children would be treated better than children of a parent who is not so strong not so strong economically.

She explained how she protected her children from this family dynamic.

I tried to, to, to make sure that my children don't get to experience that. None of my children was raised by my, my mother or my husband's family. I raised all my children. I never took my any of my children back home. But I think it, it also goes back to the strict character that I'm telling you about that I took from my father.

There seemed to be very different experiences of parenting in her family because of her family structure. She is the last born of four siblings, and there are big age gaps between her and her siblings. The siblings grew up in different generations and, had different experiences and perceptions of their parents.

And by the time I became aware and able to notice things they were already out of the house 'cause my brother is 15 years older than me. And then my elder sister was 19 years older than me. So, by the time I was ten years [old], my brother was 25, so at 25 a person is working, and he is no longer staying with us. So, you can imagine 10 years around that age, that's the one age I can see OK My father is just too strict on my on my brother. And I would remember those things. So no, the one upbringing I remember is between myself and my sister, who has four years older, so I think, the, the, the character for me really took shape from my own experience, not observing how they were treated.

Maternal Identity

Her view of motherhood entails acts of physical and emotional care for her children and creating a safe environment for them. She describes what motherhood means to her:

Motherhood for me means being the best comfort/shield/friend to my kids, being their safe space. Most importantly being there and affording to create an environment that will encourage them to achieve all that they dream about. Teach them to do their best in all they do. [Reflection]

Matsie saw herself as a protector and wants to shield her children from certain experiences. She says the need to protect her children is mainly out of fear.

motherhood means really being a protector, being a mummy bear…

Hmm, it's out of fear mostly and wanting to protect them.

She shared some things she is paranoid about and how she wished to protect her child by not exposing him to other environments.

So, such things when I see them, I'm like you know if you just stay in the house, you won't experience these things. So, I'm just being a Mama bear I guess trying to protect them, but yeah.

Matsie hides her vulnerabilities and fears from her children, although she wants them to understand her perspective. However, she sets rules and discusses her perspective with her children to help them understand her reasoning. She also values showing love and concern as central elements of motherhood.

Doing your best just to raise good kids who behave good. Yeah, I, I think, like I haven't really thought about it, but for me motherhood, that's all that I do. Doing my best for my kids. Um and I just wouldn't have it any other way, they are mine and I have to be there to protect them and to provide for them.

Inherited Parenting Style

Matsie's parenting style seems to have adopted her father's way of parenting, placing value in authoritarian approaches. She describes herself as a strict parent like her father.

...the weird thing is that even now myself as, as a as a mother I see myself on my father [crying]. I'm just too hard on my children, especially my girl children. When we visit home, I don't even allow them to get out of the house.

She considers her parenting style as an inherited way of life.

So, I guess it's, it's confirmation that he was even strict on me because here I am. Um, I wouldn't say genes. Maybe it is genes that it runs in our family, that we are just strict and too paranoid.

Similar to the quote above, the one below shows the contention between ideas of nature and nurture, alluding to inherent traits versus observed behaviour.

> *[…] but you are the one person who, um, who always corrects people. Like I'm the last born, but I was the one person who was firm and always telling them no, don't do this, don't do that. Don't bring a boyfriend, don't bring a girlfriend, and don't bring a child at home, raise your child for yourself. And that time I was young, so my siblings, they always had this thing that you will grow up and you will experience things as well. I saw as though I'm speaking from a point of no experience, from a point of being a child, but no it's just a character thing. I, I, I'm just the type of person who I do things by the book.*

Although she sees her father's nature reflected in her and the way she parents, she is able to reflect on how her parenting can negatively affect her children.

> *Goodness. I don't allow them to, to get out of their house. When we are here in our house in Pretoria only my son, I allow him to go out and cause he's bubbly, he is people's person, so I can already see that if I don't allow him it's going to depress him. But my girls like I always tell that like this life is fast, its tough out there. So, I see my father in me a lot.*

Conclusion

In this chapter I presented the findings from Matsie's story. The chapter begins with a case description that details the participant's childhood and the nature of adversities she experienced. Her narrative showed patterns of strict parenting and its impact on Matsie's life. She was raised by a strict father who dominated her home and shaped the adult she became. Her narrative also shows her internal struggles of accepting how her father's discipline has affected her and the psychological distress it caused her. As a mother, she sees similarities between her character and her father's nature and parenting styles.

Chapter 12: Boitumelo's Story: A Struggle to Accept Motherhood

Introduction

In this chapter I present the findings from my interview with Boitumelo and her reflection. Boitumelo is a 32-year-old mother of two children and is recently divorced. She is the second child of five siblings. Growing up she had a close relationship with her father but did not get along with her mother. Her childhood was normal, with equal opportunities amongst her and her siblings. Her mother was strict and used corporal punishment as a means of disciplining the children. She experienced child abuse in the form of sexual abuse, resulting in her first pregnancy at the age of 17. Before this, she also experienced physical abuse from her mother, which she interpreted differently as she got older. She has an estranged relationship with her older child, who was mainly raised by her parents.

Primary Analytical Themes

Trauma Narrative: Long-Term Emotional Consequences of Abuse

Boitumelo had a complex relationship with her mother. Although she grew up in a strict family household, she perceived her mother as harsher towards her than her siblings.

> *Well, there was an issue of me and my mother didn't get along so well. She would beat me every second day, but I used to take it that she doesn't like me, she doesn't love me so I felt its physical abuse but yeah, now that I'm older, it gives a different definition of what happened then.*

Now, in her adult life, her perception of her mother has changed. She considers her behaviour as non-abusive. Although she does not discuss what changed her perception, the change in her interpretation could be related to her profession as a social worker and her understanding of abuse from a professional perspective. As a mother, she could also reconstruct discipline and what abuse means.

Well, I feel she was just trying to discipline me, maybe that's the only way she knew how. But on another hand, I could say it helped me and shaped me to be the person that I am today. And responsible as I am, I think it came from the hiding. So now I don't see it as abused or her not loving me, but I see that she only meant well, she just didn't know how to go about it.

Her experience of sexual abuse in her teenage years changed the trajectory of her life. She describes the event below.

OK, the awful event that happened was I was sexually abused and that's how I lost my virginity, that resulted in my first pregnancy.

She explains how she negotiated with her abuser and tried to protect herself.

After some few minutes there was a knock on the window and it was one of the friends that were in the circle during the day, who said they had locked him out of his home. They opened the window, and he went through, and they continue with their business. So, he started now wanting to say no and I like you and all that and I said, "but I was with you the whole day and you never said anything, so we'll talk in the morning". So those two that were busy started laughing at him to I am rejecting him, and then he then started using force and then I said to him, "at least use a condom". Because the other thing, the way we sneaked into the house, I was afraid to scream and wake the mother up because it would mean all of us would be in trouble.

Boitumelo was not able to speak to her parents about what had happened to her until she was visibly pregnant. She silenced her traumatic experience out of fear of her parents and the shame associated with teenage pregnancy. She explains how her peers treated her and how she was ostracized.

My peers mock me, it would be a joke that I'm pregnant. It was very frustrating because it's something that I didn't ask for and maybe I took time to get rid of, but yeah, here it is, and I'm stuck with it. So, I got a lot of unfair treatment that I had to take in and live with. So yeah, until I gave birth.

The sexual abuse and teenage pregnancy affected her identity, her social life, her academics, as well as the long-term consequences in forming relationships. She developed anger and finds it difficult to be intimate in relationships.

But I developed a lot of anger, which to date has ruined a lot of my relationships. Today I can't even have a partner and be intimate with because it always triggers back to that event. I don't know how will ever get past that, but though I try, I try to do something say but hey this is has passed this over, my son is grown but it always takes me back to saying somebody took advantage of me. Somebody did what I didn't like to my body, so it's difficult for me now to be in a relationship and my boyfriend would touch me. It freaks me out. I get very angry, so that is the long and short of it, what happened.

Although she struggles with intimacy and forming relationships, she was married when she had her second child. However, certain behaviours in the relationship triggered the trauma she experienced, and the marriage ended in a divorce.

So, the second one I would say I enjoy it, but just after birth, the men also changed to something else. So, it then triggered the first event, then it made me become very defensive of everything, to be defensive of my kids, of my body, of everything. So, it actually even ruined the relationship because when the relationship went sour, it reminded me then here is another man wanting

to take advantage of my body again. So, to a point that even that relationship ended because of sex.

She has associated sexual intercourse with sexual trauma, which affects her ability to be intimate.

So, to me is this where, if you feel you are entitled to sex, if you feel you entitled to my body, then you don't deserve me. Though somebody would say being in a relationship sex is part of being in a relationship, to me it's the last thing on my mind. And if it doesn't even happen, I'd be the happiest person alive. Because it doesn't bring good memories to my mind.

However, it seems that the nature of her relationship and the man's behaviour is integral in creating a safe or unsafe space for her. She also sourced help with dealing with the issue; however, there are other factors that affect her intimacy in relationships.

I don't know because I've tried. I've tried counselling, I've tried using tablets, I've tried everything. For some time I will be fine, the minute I feel like a man is feeling entitled to my body I relapsed back to square one. So, I don't think it will ever be fine. I don't know.

She describes her internal struggle with triggers and trying to create a space for intimacy.

I pray it would go back to normal so I can be a normal person like everybody again, but it's very hard to at this point. I would feel like I'm making progress. I'm becoming better, but the minute I say no to somebody, and he uses a bit of force, then it triggers back everything. So I don't know if it will ever. I don't know if it will ever.

Her comment below reflects the narrative around sexual intimacy and how men and women negotiate and are perceived to interpret sexual behaviour differently.

> *Yeah, no, especially if I say no and they don't back down because I, the perception now is when we say no, we are playing hard to get. So the person would just try to pursue you a little more, but to me it's not perusing a little more, just irritating. And it's you now wanting to take advantage of me. And then my defense just rises, and I would even kill for sure.*

Boitumelo's struggle with intimacy results from the trauma-specific fear associated with her specific sexual trauma (Terr, 1995). This is evidenced in her comfort in being in a relationship for companionship but her discomfort with sexual intimacy. Her story paints a picture of the long-lasting effects of trauma, including the struggle to maintain healthy relationships and the challenge of dealing with memories that are retriggered in certain situations.

Motherhood from Sexual Trauma and Efforts of Reparation

Boitumelo's narrative shows some of her struggles with accepting her child conceived from sexual abuse. Her narrative shows contrasts between motherhood after a traumatic experience and mothering in the context of marriage.

Her transition to motherhood during her first pregnancy was difficult, and the circumstances around her pregnancy inflated the challenges. She describes the mixed emotions and difficulty accepting motherhood in the following reflection.

> *Very quickly I had to move from being a teenager to being a mother, which was not easy on me. There was a phase of denial, there was a phase of anger, there was a phase of just mixed emotions that came with, but with time I learnt to appreciate motherhood. There was a phase of denial, there was a phase of*

anger, there was a phase of just mixed emotions that came with, but with time I learnt to appreciate motherhood. I learned to appreciate my son, I learned to love him, to bond with him and to uhm become a better mother and that's what I strive for on a daily basis. To be a better mother, to protect my kids.

She became pregnant when she was exploring her youth, and the pregnancy catapulted her into being a mother. This came with responsibilities, even though she was at least able to go back to school and pursue a higher degree while her parents cared for her child. Having a second child was by choice and she had control over the circumstances more than her first experience. She had chosen to be a mother, and hence her experience was different.

The second baby I actually wanted, because I felt this would be my first. I wanted to experience and enjoy it because then I was with somebody who made me feel safe, who made me feel appreciated, who made me feel that it's okay, it's normal to have sex. Who seemed very understanding to say when I say no, he would stop. So, I felt safe. And I was ready for my second one, I thought I'm working now, I don't have to depend on anyone to take care of my kids, I can take care of my kids, I can enjoy the pregnancy like people are doing, do photo shoots. Do all these things that pregnant people do. So I wanted that experience because my first one I didn't have.

According to her, her second child has given her a first experience of motherhood because she did not raise the first child.

I'm only learning better with the little one now because I'm staying with her full time so they are, I would say this is my first kid. I'm still learning this motherhood thing because the first one was also taken away from.

The comment above shows a full-time versus part-time mothering discourse and how she makes sense of motherhood as a full-time role. It is worth noting that Boitumelo loves both her children, although she struggles forming a relationship with her first born because she did not raise him. The circumstances surrounding her son's birth also created a challenge for her to accept being a mother, although she loves her child.

> *So, I also try it, it's still it also it's challenge for me because the first one I didn't even raise because my parents took him from me. They felt the anger I had, I would probably hate him or even kill him. So, they took him away from me when he was five days, but it didn't even have the bond with him. I'm only trying to have a bond with him now, so there's certain things I don't know about him that I would sometimes lose my patience and shout at him.*

Children born of sexual trauma may be perceived as a constant reminder of the mother's traumatic experience (Kantengwa, 2014). Boitumelo's parents gave her an opportunity to return to university by taking care of her child; however, she perceived this support as having negative consequences for the mother-child relationship. She expressed challenges with bonding with her child and a sense of guilt for not having the initial bond, which relates to their initial attachment and the role of her mother as the main caregiver. Her mentalisation of trauma is important in trying to repair the mother-child relationship. However, unresolved attachment in mothers with a history of abuse can lead to disorganised attachment in their children (Berthelot et al., 2015).

She expressed a need for support and resources to cope with her trauma and to parent differently. As Kantengwa noted, "Raising children born of rape requires resources to deal with psychological and financial problems that mothers cannot always secure" (2014, p. 427).

In Boitumelo's case, financial support was available however psychological support was neglected. She tries to repair her relationship with her child as compensation for the lost time.

> *There was a phase of denial, there was a phase of anger, there was a phase of just mixed emotions that came with, but with time I learnt to appreciate motherhood. I learned to appreciate my son, I learned to love him, to bond with him and to uhm become a better mother and that's what I strive for on a daily basis.*

She went through different phases of grieving the loss of her childhood and becoming a mother too soon. She works on building a relationship with her son and being a better mother. Motherhood provided meaning to life, which was evident in her motive for furthering her studies and working hard to provide for her children.

> *But it also says to me if I didn't have these kids would I even have went to school? Because that's the other thing that pushed me to go to school to say I need to have a qualification, I need to work for these people so that I can feed them. So if they were not there, I would still be probably hoping from one course to another, even not even completing a degree, because I would not know what I want or I would not have a focus of what I want in life because there would be just too much freedom.*

Motherhood has given her the hope to live and a reason to achieve academically. It seems that motherhood, and especially having a second child, could have been a reparative gesture for childhood experiences.

The balancing act: Motherhood vs Freedom

Boitumelo did not have the full experience of the initial stages of motherhood. Motherhood was a difficult transition for her as a teenager. Her narrative of motherhood

alludes to a struggle between motherhood and what she sees as the freedom to live one's youthful life.

> *And so there's still that imbalance that happens now and then to say, I want to love my kids, I want to be there for them. But I also want to enjoy my life. So yeah, I love them, but I [laughs] there's an element of absenteeism somewhere.*

Comparing herself to her peers causes her emotional discomfort, which she likened to depression.

> *But it depresses me now to think that people my age are still establishing themselves, they are studying, they are focusing on building themselves, acquiring things in life and being settled before having kids.*

According to her, motherhood at a young age took away her opportunities to build her life. She is sometimes overwhelmed by trying to balance her life as a young working mother.

> *I'm still trying to find my feet as a mother, as a young woman and the working field. And it's just it becomes overwhelming sometimes, and you don't even have a break, or you don't have someone who says let me take the kids for ice cream so that you can just be alone with your thoughts, they are always in your face.*

The above quotes show how she felt she traded her freedom for motherhood and the challenging transition to the role. Motherhood brings about many lifestyle changes for young women including disruptions in schooling, career aspirations, and social lives (Mjwara & Maharaj, 2018). Boitumelo associated motherhood with responsibilities and a life centred around children.

But it depresses me now to think that people my age are still establishing themselves, they are studying, they are focusing on building themselves, acquiring things in life and being settled before having kids. So, it has that element of regret to say that I would have studied further, I would have become a better person education wise, I would have bought a house, maybe a car, established myself first and not depend on anyone to assist me with my kids.

While she loves her children and wants to care for them, she feels the regret of not achieving certain milestones before having children. She finds meaning in motherhood and acknowledges how it might have affected her life positively. The quote below shows her constant struggle and emotions about being a mother.

So, if they were not there, I would still be probably hoping from one course to another, even not even completing a degree, because I would not know what I want or I would not have a focus of what I want in life because there would be just too much freedom. So yeah, it's that's on the fence, I feel when emotions are I feel depressed. When emotions are normal, I feel the blessing in disguise.

Boitumelo's narrative shows resilience and agency amidst her struggles with motherhood. She strives towards securing a better future for her children and managing her freedom.

Maternal Identity: Reconstructing Self

The following quotes reflect how she constructs motherhood and her identity as a mother.

So being a mother for me means I am the world to somebody, I must have solutions, I must always be there, I must be able to do anything they ask me to

do. So, its, being a mother to me it's being somebody's superhero and just being there at all times, good or bad, hard or easy, but ja being there and knowing that my kids can always depend on me regardless of what they go through. [Reflection]

So being a mother to me means uhh, it means protection, it means support, it means unconditional love because it came at a time I didn't expect so I had to transact from one phase of life to another. [Reflection]

Although she struggled with accepting the maternal identity and sometimes regrets being a mother too soon, she loves her children. When asked what kind of a mother she thinks she is, she responds by saying the following.

I would say I'm a loving mother.

I don't beat my kids. I prefer to talk to them. I get to a point of screaming, shouting. I lose my patience at times, them but I, but that's screaming, and impatience also stems from "I didn't ask for this, I didn't ask for these people". So sometimes I off-ramp.

She positions herself as a protector who creates space for her children to communicate with her should they be victimised. Motherhood was perceived as something one transitions to once they have accomplished much and are ready to "settle down". Her protectiveness over her children stems from the fear that they would experience the trauma she experienced.

The Need for Support

The need for support during and after pregnancy was evident in Boitumelo's narrative.

So, with the first one I wish maybe I was able to tell my parents at an earlier stage, I could have gotten support and counselling for the ordeal I went through…

It seemed that her perception of what support entails changed over the years between her first and second pregnancies. With her first pregnancy her parents showed disappointment and anger at the situation and the news of the rape. Although her parents cared for her child and provided material supported, she felt unsupported by their decision to take her child. She was also disappointed by their focus on the perpetrator as opposed to focusing on the support she needed. Part of the support she needed from her parents was them allowing her to be involved in her child's life although they were the primary caregivers.

So, with the first one, maybe they should also have allowed me to be part of his upbringing, because then they even decided on his name. I didn't even have a say on what to call him.

However, with her second child, she received a lot of support from her family and her husband, which made the motherhood experience different.

So yeah, with the second one, the support was there, but not fully so because after the first month I was alone and I had to see going forth what happens, though the husband was supportive. But yeah, even he was not always there because he would work night shift. But I would say if I had to compare the two situations, the second one was way better than the first.

With the second one, there was so much support that I found out when I was three weeks pregnant, and everybody was happy. I didn't have to hide it. I could eat whatever I want, and you know, with the second one I got support.

She contrasted her unmet support needs support during her first pregnancy and those she received in her second pregnancy. In African cultures, a new mother will live with an older woman, usually their mother, to assist with the childcare and the mother's postnatal healing and to orientate the mother into their new role. Traditionally this happens for three months while the mother is on maternity leave. This support also lets the new mother psychologically transition to mother work. In addition to mentalising her trauma and how it affects her mothering, Boitumelo tried to seek professional help to cope with her childhood and other struggles. However, she has not found healing in this process of psychological assistance.

Conclusion

In this chapter I presented the findings from Boitumelo's story. The chapter begins with a case description that introduces the participant and details the nature of her childhood adversities. I then discussed the themes identified from her unique story. Boitumelo's story shows the long-lasting effects of trauma, including the struggle to have healthy relationships, the challenge of dealing with memories that are retriggered in certain situations, and the journey toward healing and finding balance. Her story shows what informed her maternal identity and her struggles to accept motherhood especially with her first pregnancy. Motherhood signified juxtapositions of loss of freedom and of hope to her.

Chapter 13: Comparative Analysis and Interpretation of Data

Introduction

The previous chapters presented findings from each case study focusing on individual life stories. In this chapter, I expand on the analysis by comparing the findings across all cases. The analytic themes are provided and examined in terms of the links between these themes and the literature and the Ecological Systems Theory. As will be shown in the discussion below, experiences of childhood adversity shape maternal identities and how women position themselves and others. In the discussion I elucidate the interaction between personal characteristics, external systems that influence the family, and the proximal processes influencing developmental outcomes. The women's childhood narratives and their construction of motherhood are situated within their social, historical, and cultural contexts.

Upbringing: A Time of Stability vs Instability

The discussion here centres around the women's upbringing and themes of stability and instability influenced by the different environmental systems in their context. Family instability is associated with negative behavioural and socioeconomic outcomes across the transition from adolescence to adulthood (Gaydosh & Harris, 2018). However, there is limited evidence to indicate a relationship between family instability and adult physical health outcomes. Family instability in this study included constant mobility and migration, family structures and the role of fathers. I argue that family stability plays a role in the victimisation of children and the possible perpetuation of cycles of abuse. When asked to speak about their childhood, the women in this study revealed narratives of difficult upbringing characterised by times of stability and instability. Most participants indicated that they had some unstable upbringing. However, they also experienced times of stability and consistency in their childhood. The sub-themes discussed here show how non-normative

transitions such as moving, parental divorce and death influenced the women's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

Unstable Movements: Fragmentations of Family Lives

Moving around was a common theme within the instability narratives, which some described as being abrupt. It showed that children were not informed or consulted in decisions regarding their living arrangements. Multiple residential moves during childhood were reported by all but one of the participants. While some children were being moved around to protect them from the violence or abuse in their homes, for some, the movements were a source of their trauma often associated with neglect. Constant changes in the child's environment affected their social context and adaptation. For example, after her mother's divorce, Hope struggled to adapt to life in the township. She described her school as the only constant environment in her life at that stage.

A child's home serves as a central context for their development (Coley & Kull, 2016) and a context where proximal processes occur. As Bronfenbrenner (1994) proposed human development is through reciprocal interactions between the developing person and the people, objects, and symbols in their immediate setting. However, inconsistencies in these interactions can be detrimental to the person's developmental processes. Furthermore, Bronfenbrenner and Morris state (2006) that development occurs through activities that occurs over extended periods of time. Therefore, the constant moves during childhood interrupted the children's primary interactions within the microsystem and may have slowed the pace of their development. For example, the inconsistent interactions with adults within the different homes negatively influenced some women's attachments into adulthood, while others developed resilience and independence.

The developmental timing of children's mobility or change in residency is an important factor for children's adjustment and functioning. Research shows that children who move homes between birth and kindergarten (around 5/6 years old) have significantly lower social skills and higher internalising and externalising problems (Coley & Kull, 2016). However, the present retrospective study did not consider developmental timing at which the participants moved around in the childhood. Nevertheless, in some instances the timing could be deduced in relation to the mention of other contexts such as schools. The interaction between processes in the child's home and their functioning in other systems, such as school, is important for this finding, which signifies the mesosystem. Multi-setting participation occurs when the child enters schooling, and inconsistent changes in these settings may hamper or enhance their developmental potential. Unstable residential mobility is coupled with changes in the school environment, which may cause difficulties with adjustments and cognitive skills. The stability of home environments in the earlier years of life is important for children's psychosocial functioning (Coley & Kull, 2016). For example, for Fezile, moving to a foreign country added layers of complexity which involved foster care and different cultural practices and household traditions. Moving between foster homes can cause multiple psychological harm to children because they are exposed to unstable households, which might manifest during their adult lifetime. Although I did not explore at what ages the women experienced these movements, it was explicit that mobility differed for each participant. While Fezile seems to have lived with her aunt at an age where she was starting school, Moloko constantly moved with her mother from infancy.

The unstable movements reported by the participants in this study align with previous reports on migration and the disruptions of Black families. I move the discussion here to focus on migration as an overarching interpretation of the reported mobility in this study. Migration has received much research attention in South Africa concerning the historical

context of apartheid and its disruption to family lives (Hall & Posel, 2019; Lee, 2009; Posel, 2004; Posel & Casale, 2003; Posel & van der Stoep, 2008; Ramphele & Richter, 2006; Reed, 2013). The relationship between many children and their caregivers has been disrupted by factors related to migration from rural areas to urban cities (Dawes & Donald, 2000). Although migrations were restricted for Black South Africans under the apartheid laws, there is evidence that this phenomenon increased even before the end of apartheid (Reed, 2013). Reed's findings from retrospective data showed a peak in the migration of Black people in 1992 and a subsequent increase after 1994 after the first democratic elections. Their findings revealed that migration doubled between 1976–1985 and 1994–2000. Therefore, the women in my study were raised during the peak of migration, hence this was prominent in their narratives.

Rabe (2006) noted that men's status between migrant or resident fathers was fluid as some participants in her study changed living arrangements from time to time. Similarly, for example, Moloko's father worked in mining areas and constantly changed the family's living arrangements. This was compounded with her father's alcoholism, which cost him his job, resulting in changes in living arrangements. The literature within the family stress model shows how economic hardship or pressure influences parenting and ultimately influences children's development (Conger & Donnellan, 2007; Masarik & Conger, 2017; Neppl et al., 2015). Correspondingly, the ecological model proposes that occurrences in the outer social ecological systems influences the systems in which the development occurs and thus impacts development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986). This proposition has been tested by other development scholars such as Boxer et al., (2013) in the context of ecological violence and the development of children's aggression. In line with Boxer et al.'s findings, the present study suggests that occurrences in higher order social systems such as the sociopolitical context influence occurrences within families and affects children's development. Economic

pressure may cause parental psychological distress, leading to interparental relationship problems and disruptions in parenting. This disruption in parenting then leads to children's maladjustment. Considering the nested systems in the bioecological model, these findings show the interaction between outer systems and how they influence proximal processes (including child maltreatment) within the microsystem.

Migration is gendered, with literature historically dominated by male migration. However, earlier findings also show increases in women's labour migration and settlement in urban South Africa during the '90s (Lee, 2009; Posel, 2004; Posel & Casale, 2003). In the 1980s, men were increasingly having difficulty securing employment (Hunter, 2006). This meant that women who were mothers moved away from their children for work-related purposes. Correspondingly, the majority of the women in this study reported their mothers to have been in formal employment, this was often accompanied by children living with extended family or moving between homes. Although migration is extensively studied amongst men and women in this context, very few studies centre children in the discourse (Hall & Posel, 2019), the apparent disruptions of family lives, and evident implications for children. Thus, the findings in this study add a retrospective lens of migration and mobility from the adult child's perspective.

As mentioned consistently in this thesis, disrupting family lives is an important legacy of South Africa's historical past; however, there are continuities of the fragmentation of families related to labour migration (Hall & Posel, 2019). Migration is tied to freedom of movement, a luxury that Black people did not have previously; this movement has implications for family lives. However, the move from a focus on migration to immigration is worth noting as it pertains to permanent movements of families in the post-apartheid era (Posel, 2004). While some people moved permanently from their places of origin to their places of work, others continued circular migration. I draw from Fezile's narrative, which

showed the complexity and interchange of forms of migration and emigration in her life as a child and currently as an adult. Fezile migrated with her aunt to a different country while her father remained in South Africa as a migrant labourer. When her parents reached financial stability later in life, they repatriated her back to South Africa. Her constant moves built her adaptability and her outlook on life and relationships. For example, she describes how she allows her children "to dream" and to travel. Immigration and migration are subjects of contestation, given the discourses in media and political narratives. However, as Posel (2004, p. 286) previously concluded, what is presented in case studies of immigration "may simply be the continuation of circular (cross-border) migration".

What was clear in the findings in this study is the interconnections between parents' marital status and children's living arrangements. Where parents were not married, children lived in family homes where extended family members lived or were left in the care of others. For example, Moloko and Hope's parents were young and not married although they lived together at some point. Similar to Ramphele and Richter's (2006) chapter contribution, participants in this study whose parents were unmarried recalled living with extended families at some point. Children born before marriage were expected to stay with their maternal family even when the mother married (Ramphele & Richter, 2006). In addition, the participants whose parents divorced also experienced constant moves between homes.

Divorce represents a crucial fragmentation of a family and a stressful transitional phase for members of a family. Divorce may be an additional adversity for children who have already experienced abuse before parental abuse. A review of studies from the U.S. showed that children from divorced families scored lower than their counterparts on various indicators of wellbeing including academic achievement, conduct, self-concept, psychological adjustment and social competence (Amato, 2000, 2010).

Furthermore, while some children soon adapt to divorce, others show long-term functional issues. Amongst other consequences, Amato's (2010) review showed that adults with divorced parents usually obtained less education. This finding contrasts with what was reported in this study where two of the five women (40%) whose parents divorced had obtained high levels of education, while two (40%) were currently studying towards higher tertiary education, and one did not narrate her educational achievements. However, this may be due to the recruitment site and the effect of snowball sampling amongst urban women. Another consequence of divorce seen in Khanyi's narrative, was her own marriage ending in divorce and her experiencing similar conflict and abuse in her marriage as that which she witnessed between her parents. Further research would be needed to assess the consequences of parental divorce or separation on the population in my study. However, it was evident that divorce signified a time of instability in the participants' childhood and related to children's unstable living arrangements.

Family Structures: Guardianship and Kinship Care

The family structure category delves into the forms of family setups, such as nuclear, extended, or single-parent households, and how these structures affected on the participants' lives. Research shows that family structures (dynamic/systems) are an important contributing factor to parenting practices and the treatment of children (Cicchetti & Valentino, 2015; Makiwane et al., 2016; Taliep et al., 2018). Parenting practices may cause certain behaviours in children or leave children vulnerable to adversities. Participants in the study were raised in various family structures that played a role in the adversities they experienced and resulted in some outcomes in their parenting. The most common structure included living with extended family for various reasons (e.g. parents working far from home, marital status). The parents did not live consistently with their children in the same household. This is consistent with studies indicating that many children in South Africa do not live consistently with their

parents (Hall & Posel, 2019; Hall & Sambu, 2019; Makiwane et al., 2017; Ndagurwa & Nzimande, 2016; Posel & van der Stoep, 2008). Kinship care plays a significant role in alternative care arrangements for these children. As such, many children encounter various caregivers, are raised without fathers, or do not live in the same household as their biological siblings (Hall & Sambu, 2019). Additionally, grandparents are often the primary caregivers, while parents migrate for employment purposes (Lee, 2009; Makiwane et al., 2017; Moore, 2013).

Six participants in the study encountered different caregivers in their childhood for various periods. These participants reported living with extended family or not living with their parents in their childhood. In this context, parental absence does not necessarily mean parental abandonment (Hall & Sambu, 2019). However, participants in this study perceived their family structures and parents' decisions differently. For example, Hunadi, interpreted her mother's absence as abandonment while other women described the economic needs motivating their parents to leave them in the care of others. Hunadi lived with her grandparents while her mother completed her university studies. At some point, her mother was working away from home while she (Hunadi) lived with her stepfather. Another participant, Fezile, seemed to have a different perspective on her parents' decision to leave her in the care of relatives, showing an understanding of the parents' precarious circumstances. Although the women interpreted their family structures differently, they described how their living arrangements were characterised by times of both stability and instability and their role in their difficult childhood.

It is important to interpret subjective experiences with caution and understand individual differences of guardianship and kinship care as a crucial part of African lives. While a Western nuclear family generally includes a couple and their children, Black African families may consist of more than just the immediate family. As Siqwana-ndulo (1998, pg.

415) claimed, what the Westerners call “extended family” among Africans refers to a “collectivity of people who live together, whose relationship could be traced through kinship or marriage, and who consider themselves family”. Within these extended family structures, the responsibility of raising and supporting children falls on all family members, including or in addition to the biological parents (Mkhize, 2006). As shown in Fezile’s story, she was fostered by relatives, family friends, and a community of church women for periods of time due to circumstances. Kinship care in the African context is not regulated and rarely involves legal guardianship (Ariyo et al., 2019). It is, however, a common practice based on the principle of *ubuntu/botho,* which supports collectivism and communal responsibility. “*Botho/ubuntu* is characterised by caring and compassion for others, especially the most vulnerable; connectedness to and ongoing fellowship with the ancestors; and commitment to the common good” (Lesejane, 2006, p. 174).

African family structures and kinship relations have been extensively studied (Ariyo et al., 2019; Hays & Mindel, 1973; Makiwane et al., 2017; Moore, 2013; Sibanda, 2011; Siqwana-ndulo, 1998; Wilson, 1984, 1986). What is clear from literature is that African families have long relied on kinship and extended family for support. These extended families usually “form” due to historical factors, marital and interpersonal factors, and socioeconomic factors (Wilson, 1989). Historically, the extended families often included a family patriarch, the most senior male in the family (Lesejane, 2006). Although disruptions of family lives over the years may have tampered with this structure and the positioning of fathers. The aim of the discussion here, however, is not to pathologise or problematise extended and guardian family structures but to highlight the stabilities and instabilities associated with these structures from the perspective of adults who experienced adversities in the childhood.

In this study, guardianship family structures in women's experiences were a source of contradictions of stability and instability. The findings in this study indicate that guardianship family structure and the fostering of children highlight alternative family arrangements, often necessitated by various circumstances, and their effect on childhood experiences. Some guardians sacrifice to provide for and protect the children, although in these same households, children were exposed to maltreatment from other members of the family. Grandparents and other relatives were a source of support and relief during times of crisis. For example, when Fezile's parents could not care for her, she was sent to live with her aunt in a different country. Moloko's mother in turn would shield her children from their father's violence by sending them to their grandparents. Hope's mother protected her children from being exposed to their father's violence by sending them to her family intermittently. These findings are consistent with Hays and Mindel's (2016) assertion that the family becomes a more pervasive and encompassing structure meeting the needs of Black people given their historical experience with institutions that previously provided support to White people. However, these care arrangements rendered the children vulnerable to abuse and maltreatment. Fezile and Matsie experienced maltreatment from guardians and others in the household, and Moloko had similar experiences with relatives. However, Moloko also described how her extended family cared for her materially and invested in her obtaining tertiary education.

These contradicting experiences indicate how forms of support may be competing in extended families and guardianship care. These mixed findings on the impact of kinship care on children are consistent with findings from Ariyo et al. (2019) findings from a review of studies in the African context. They compared the well-being of children in kinship care and those in other care settings in the African context. Their results showed mixed outcomes concerning children's education, health, social and emotional development. Furthermore,

family structures have important implications for children's schooling outcomes in South Africa (Ndagurwa & Nzimande, 2016). Findings from Ndagurwa and Nzimande confirm that children from nuclear family structures usually do better in school than those in other family structures. This suggests that complex family structures or children's living arrangements can have negative and positive developmental outcomes with moderating factors in the child's ecology. These factors include the degree of relatedness to the foster parent, socio-economic status of the fostering households, the age and gender of the fostered child, and fostering circumstances. The age and gender factors are important concerning the findings in this study, considering the disadvantages experienced by the participants, although comparisons cannot be drawn because the sample was homogenous in gender.

Matsie reported living with her grandmother and her mother's siblings for periods of time. She exhibited eternising behavioural issues in her teenage years, struggled academically, and became pregnant. Moloko experienced maltreatment in kinship care arrangements during her teenage years after losing her parents. This also follows previous findings showing that older girls were more disadvantaged than males, younger fostered female children, or children not in fostered arrangements (Ariyo et al., 2019). What was also common among participants who grew up in guardianship families or in their parents' family homes was resource sharing and, sometimes, even conflicts with siblings or other children in the home. This finding aligns with literature that discusses resource-sharing dynamics within families, which can be influenced by factors like economic circumstances, family size, and cultural practices.

I conclude from these findings that guardianship and kinship family structures were experienced differently by women with a history of childhood trauma. Kinship care and guardianship structures can buffer against adverse effects of a traumatic childhood; however, the same can also be harmful and lead to adversities. This aligns with what Merçon-Vargas et

al. (2020) argue regarding proximal processes that might produce dysfunction. Guardianship households are environments in which child-caregiver interactions can be negative, such as where maltreatment occurs, causing harm to the child's development. Thus, this finding is in line with the idea of inverse proximal processes (Merçon-Vargas et al., 2020). My findings are consistent with other studies in South Africa showing the role of family structures in the occurrence of ACEs (Manyema & Richter, 2019). However, the role of the extended family has diminished over the years and other forms of support such as churches play a significant role in offering support (Makiwane et al., 2017). These alternative forms of support are discussed below as protective factors identified in the women's narratives. Furthermore, complex families are on the rise including single parent families, child headed families, and multigenerational families (Makiwane et al., 2017). Considering this, I argue that non-nuclear families (i.e. extended families) should be included in definitions of the microsystem especially in applications of Bronfenbrenner's theory in non-western contexts.

The Role of Fathers: Father Absence, Presence, and Disengagement

For most women in the study, their mothers were the main caregivers and breadwinners in the family, and fathers were positioned differently. This is consistent with other findings in the South African context, where women are the breadwinners of their household (Makusha et al., 2013; Parry & Segalo, 2017). It has been reported that male-headed households are less common among Africans and Coloureds compared to Whites and Indians (Makiwane et al., 2017). Most participants in this study narrated inconsistencies with their father's involvement in their lives during their childhood or their father's absence. These inconsistencies were characterised by times when the women remember their fathers to have been present, and at times, they were absent in their lives. It was interesting that some descriptions of the father-daughter relationships were limited to statements such as "I was a

daddy's girl". This limited the analysis of the role fathers and meanings attached to the statements.

Furthermore, two of the participants had active and supportive stepfathers about whom they spoke of in high regard. Fathers who were present played an estranged role in some women's childhoods. As stated by Morell, "A father might well be physically present, but emotionally absent, or physically absent but emotionally supportive" (2006, p. 18). The meaning of father absence in South Africa may also vary according to culture (Peyper et al., 2015) and relational context (East et al., 2006). For example, a father may not live with the child due to marital conflict but provide financially and be occasionally available for milestones in the child's life. Nevertheless, research with women from various cultures shows that a father's absence, emotional or physical, has a negative impact on their daughters' wellbeing (Peyper et al., 2015; Ramatsetse & Ross, 2023). Adult women can harbour feelings of animosity towards their fathers which can lead to unresolved feelings of resentment and altered perception towards men (Ramatsetse & Ross, 2023).

Among the consequences of this dynamic was the impact on how women relate with the opposite sex, similar to how some women in the present study expressed their struggles with relating to men. This finding has implications on these women's microsystem and how they interact with men (or their partners) within the family context and may hamper effective proximal processes.

A father's absence can have devastating effects on children and is associated with the occurrence of ACE (Manyema & Richter, 2019). Father involvement has healthy psychological outcomes for children and better mental health as adults (Wilson & Prior, 2011). Furthermore, fathers need to be accessible, engaged, and responsible to be considered involved fathers (Wilson & Prior, 2011).

In the African context, fathers were historically positioned as providers and protectors in precolonial times; however, the notion of father has undergone tremendous changes in the recent past (Lesejane, 2006). Unlike in the Western world, where men become fathers because of biological conception, for many Africans, this role has to do with kinship ties (Lesejane, 2006; Morrell, 2006). In some cultures, fathers are judged based on their role as breadwinners or their ability to provide (Lesejane, 2006; Makusha et al., 2013). In line with this, one of the participants in this study described fathers who do not take care of their children as sperm donors and distinguished between a father and a dad. Her assertions on signalled the perceptions of masculinity and fatherhood concerning being able to provide for and protect the family. She described her father as not being a "dad," indicating her father's inactive role and lack of financial support. The expression of the desire for children to have a role model supports the positioning of a father as a role model to young men in particular (Lesejane, 2006). Her perception is also informed by her own positioning as a single mother of three boys. In addition to being a role model in the African context, Lesejane describes the role and responsibilities of a father as

> the custodian of moral authority within his family and with other patriarchs in the broader community; a leader who had final responsibility in the affairs of the family; a primary provider of the material needs of the family, from shelter to food; and a protector of the family against threatening forces of whatever nature (2006, p. 176)

However, this role is not reserved for the biological father; it can be fulfilled by other male figures in the kinship lineage or the mother's partner.

Various factors affect fathers' involvement in and co-residency with their children including migration, socio-cultural factors, and economic factors such as unemployment. The

financial disadvantage of Black men was emphasised in various chapters of Richter and Morrell (2006). Various contributors provide an understanding of the discourse of fatherhood concerning provision and how cultural responsibilities such as payment of *iLobolo* and *Inhlawulo* discussed below may have contributed to men's absence in their children's lives or disadvantaged them in raising their children (Hunter, 2006; Lesejane, 2006; Mkhize, 2006). Lobola is commonly referred to as bride price. As other scholars argue, *lobola* has been distorted and commodified to mean bride price or dowry, turning the cultural practice into a capitalist concept (Cakata & Ramose, 2023). This debate on the meaning of *lobola* is beyond the scope of this discussion; however, it bears significance to how men's roles in their children's lives can be disrupted by their economic status. *Inhlawulo* is 'payment/compensation' (often referred to as damages) made to a woman's family by an unmarried man "in order to be acknowledged as fathers and gain access to their children" (Malinga & Ratele, 2022, p. 265). In cases where the father did not intend to marry (yet), such processes (such as Inhlawulo) allowed the two families involved to decide how the child would be raised. This often included the maternal family approaching the paternal family. Upon the paternal family's acknowledgment of the child, rituals would be performed for the child in addition to compensation (Lesejane, 2006).

An example of this is evidenced in Hunadi's narrative, where her biological father was rejected because of his family's economic and religious background. Matsie's father was not given the opportunity to play the fatherly role in her life. However, it seems that her stepfather, who was able to provide financially, was accepted, although she states that he was abusive towards her mother. According to her, her estranged relationship with her mother is linked to her father's inactive role and his social standing.

Hope's parents were never married, her father was unemployed for as long as she could remember. In addition to his abuse, his inability to provide could have hampered his

relationship with his children. Furthermore, four women in the study mentioned that their parents were not married at the point of their birth. This meant that three of the women first lived in the maternal homes or alternative living arrangements were made for them. These findings showed the complexities of fatherhood and of men's involvement or absence in their children's lives. Social, cultural, and economic factors played a role in the absence of these fathers. According to Hunter (2006), marital rates amongst Zulu men declined in the 1980s due to men's inability to pay lobola and their inability to provide economically. Although these assertions were made of one cultural group, similar assertions can be made of other African groups who hold similar values and cultural practices. As Lesejane (2006) argued concerning the inhomogeneity of African culture, there are commonalities that allow assertions to be made regarding fatherhood.

The above discussion showed how fatherhood as a function of proximal process is historically and culturally contextual (Malinga & Ratele, 2022) and is an economically laden practice (Hunter, 2006). It is important to highlight the positive experiences described by some participants in whatever minor or major way. Two women described the supportive roles that their stepfathers played in their earlier lives. This supports the earlier assertion that the role of a father can be fulfilled by men who marry women who have children or by uncles within the family. It was interesting that in two narratives, although the fathers were physically abusive towards the mothers, the participants highlighted that the men were good to them as children. Here, the definition of a good father was seen as the emphasis of providing material support and being present in the child's life. This places less emphasis on emotional engagement and more on the material parts of fatherhood (Morrell, 2006). As iterated across these findings and the literature, Black African fathers' involvement in their children's lives should also be understood in line with South Africa's history of apartheid and fathers working away from their children.

The aim of this discussion was not to take away the responsibility of fathers and their agency in caring for their children; however, the theme highlights the absence and disengagement of fathers in the stories of women with a history of childhood adversities and provides a historical picture of some factors affecting fatherhood in Black African families. It is worth noting that my discussion of literature highlights the historical perspectives on the father's role and not current developments and how fathers are negotiating fatherhood in present South Africa. This is because of the historical positioning of the study and the understanding of the childhood experiences of girls born between 1980 and 1990 who experienced childhood adversities.

To tie the above discussed themes together in relation to the bioecological model, the findings supports the notion that propositions one and two of the model are interdependent (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Proposition one highlights the complex reciprocal interaction between the child and the people, objects and symbols in their immediate environment. The child's personal characteristics are not inoperative. Proposition two therefore considers these personal characteristics in conjunction with the child's (or person's) context, and development over time. Proximal processes are bidirectional, however the positioning of the women in the study indicates unidirectional processes. For example, the role of children in the families and their impact on the system was not explored.

Maternal Identity and the Construction of Motherhood

Mothering in South Africa is shaped and influenced by various factors, including race, culture, class, the history of colonialism and apartheid, and sociopolitical factors (Frizelle & Kell, 2010; Mograbi et al., 2023; Walker, 1995). This study's findings contribute to the literature in this context by adding experiences of trauma as an influential part in motherhood. Maternal identity refers to a woman's sense of self and her identity as a mother. It encompasses the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours associated with the role of being a

mother. Developing maternal identity in the transition to motherhood contributes to women's psychosocial development and relates to their adaptation to this role (Mercer, 2004). The process of maternal identity development begins in pregnancy and continues throughout motherhood (Mercer, 2004; Smith, 1999; Talmon et al., 2019). As such, pregnancy can become a psychological preparatory stage for expectant mothers (Smith, 1999); however, childhood trauma can hamper or facilitate this preparation.

Women in the study described what motherhood meant to them and how they perceived themselves as a mother. In constructing motherhood, the women had perceptions of ideal mothering, which they showed in how they assessed themselves and other women, often their own mothers and their practices. The participants in this study experienced childhood adversities or traumas that directly and indirectly involved their parents. They thus used their childhood experiences with their parents to guide how they perform mothering and to form their identity as parents. Being a mother meant identifying with what it is to be a mother and performing the role of a mother (Laney et al., 2015). Their identity reflected continuities of own maternal experiences or formations of new maternal experiences. Women reflected on motherhood as the act of providing physical and emotional care to children and always being available to their children. It encompasses the responsibility of meeting children's needs, ensuring their well-being, and providing protection and spiritual guidance.

The women's self-perceptions and maternal identity were seen in their self-efficacy (Bailey et al., 2012; Talmon et al., 2019). This self-efficacy was weaved with perceptions of other mothers and dominant ideologies of motherhood. When asked how they would describe themselves as mothers or "what kind of a mother do you think you are," women used expressions showing love, care, and protection. This indicated the positive self-perceptions women had of themselves. They also juxtaposed themselves with their mothers or other

maternal figures. Using words such as “I would never…like my mother” or “what kind of a mother does that.”

Women also make conscious efforts to parent differently from their parents. These comparisons and juxtapositions showed how the women constructed their own identities while maintaining some of the dominant ideologies of what it means to be a mother. These perceptions are consistent with the intensive mothering ideology, where women believe they should care for their children and sacrifice themselves (Hays, 1997). Some women idealised and emphasised the sacrifices their mothers made in raising them. Women added the ability to provide for their children as a major duty, suggesting the added financial part in negotiations and reconstructions of intensive mothering (Damaske, 2013). In line with other studies, the ability to care and provide for children was a motivation for them to work and a source of strength (Moodley, 2014).

The findings in terms of generational differences showed contemporary versus historical notions of mothering. The women showed an understanding of their mother’s decisions and parenting and drew distinctions. This follows earlier findings showing that “women are involved in a process of challenging discourses and practices around motherhood, but in complex ways that are both regulatory and resistant” (Frizelle & Kell, 2010, p. 34). Other studies show how women in South Africa are engaged in constant re-constructions of parenting and how they interrupt intergenerational patterns of parenting (Mograbi et al., 2023). Women were conscious not to repeat parts of their parents’ communication style and parenting choices that were distressing to them. This conscious parenting was also a protective factor and their attempt to break the cycles of trauma. Motherhood was also constructed as an expansion of self (Laney et al., 2014). This manifested in how they renegotiated their being in relation to their children and how they

became emotionally aware of themselves and others. Furthermore, motherhood was perceived to be an opportunity to shape a future generation.

Motherhood was generally a positive experience, however other mothers struggled in forming their maternal identity. Consistent with earlier findings (Frizelle & Kell, 2010; Laney et al., 2015), three participants experienced a sense of self-loss once becoming a first-time mother. For example, Boitumelo's loss of self was related to the circumstances of her pregnancy. She dissociated herself from the experience of motherhood because of the sexual trauma accompanying her transition to motherhood. Previous research also found an association between childhood sexual abuse and a perceived lack of parenting competency (Bailey et al., 2012). Like Boitumelo, Hunadi experienced pregnancy as a teenager and in the phase of transitioning from high school to tertiary. She too had challenges in identifying with her new role. Motherhood for these two women was associated with the disruption of their social developmental stages. Earlier findings suggest that the transition to motherhood may be challenging for women who are unprepared (Laney et al., 2015), such as in unexpected pregnancies and teenage pregnancies. Similar to findings from Weaver and Ussher (1997), Boitumelo felt that motherhood deprived her of her freedom and spontaneity.

Regarding loss of self, one woman described becoming a mother as an objectifying experience where the child becomes the centre of her experience, and the mother is marginalised. This theme showed how women's maternal identities were informed by their childhood experiences and circumstances surrounding their pregnancies or the process of motherhood. Their identities were intertwined with their perspectives on motherhood and the role of their own mothers. Thus, their constructions of motherhood showed influences of mothering ideals and societal expectations.

Collective Motherhood

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the traditional African view of family is communal (and self) and based on shared live and *ubuntu/botho*. And in this communal way of life, "people are morally obliged to be responsive to others' needs" (Mkhize, 2006, p. 187). In this context, childrearing is a collective responsibility shared within the extended family (Mkhize, 2006), although the women are largely the primary caregivers. Collective motherhood in this context reflects the communal and shared parts of child-rearing and motherhood within Black female communities, where the responsibility of caring for children extends beyond the biological mother to include other female relatives and community members. It encompasses experiences of being raised primarily not only by their mothers but also by aunts, grandmothers, and other female figures in the family or community.

Six participants narrated the role of other women in their childhood, who cared for them intermittently or fostered them. This collective approach to motherhood is characterised by a strong sense of communal responsibility, support, and involvement in the upbringing of children. This follows the Afrocentric motherhood ideology discussed in the literature (Collins, 1987, 1998) findings from South Africa (Robinson, 2014). The stories of women in this study showed the role played by multiple women at different times of the participant's childhood and the collective responsibility these women shared in raising the children. Grandmothers and aunts were the main role players in providing support for young mothers and in caring for their children in their absence. This approach to mothering reveals the cultural factors influencing the construction of motherhood within these black families. The understanding of black women's cultural practices may increase the effectiveness of mental health resources that women need to buffer the stressors they encounter as mothers and as adults (Spates, 2012).

Intergenerational Cycles of Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences

Bradfield (2011) explains intergenerational trauma as referring to the process by which elements of a parent's traumatic experiences are passed on to their children. Trauma can be passed on differently including biologically during pregnancy (Mcdonnell & Valentino, 2016) and, as Gobodo-Madikizela (2016. p.3) notes, in "…subtle ways through stories or silences, through unarticulated fears and the psychological scars that are often left unacknowledged". Studies show that a mother's traumatic childhood can affect their child's development and psychological well-being (Berthelot et al., 2015; Greenfield et al., 2019; Mcdonnell & Valentino, 2016; Narayan et al., 2019; Plant et al., 2018; Sun et al., 2017) and on parenting (Bailey et al., 2012). In this study I did not implicitly investigate the effect of the mother's trauma on her children; however, some participants spoke about the effects of their childhood experiences on their children and particularly how they parent. They also talked about their parents' childhood and its influence on their experiences with their parents. This indicating that their parents' childhood trauma impacted them and that adversities were in some cases passed down from one generation to another. This is consistent with earlier findings where parents with a history of ACE described the impact of their childhood on current relationships and on their children (Woods-Jaeger et al., 2018). What was clear was that some of the participants' own parents experienced childhood adversities or suffering which affected the participants' lives in relation to the adversities they incurred.

Consistent with Moore (2013), intergenerational relations between some mothers and daughters caused tensions which affect mothering practices. For example, the tension between Hunadi and her mother affected her abrupt decisions about her own children. Mother-daughter tensions were identified in two other participants' trauma narratives. However, only one of these women spoke of their mother's experience of childhood maltreatment and the tensions between her mother and grandmother. Three participants spoke

about their fathers and the experiences that may have contributed to their fathers' behaviour or adult outcomes. For example, Moloko narrated the dependency of her paternal family on her father and the respect he was given even though he was abusive. Her father's violence could have been related to the family's dependence on him and the pressure associated with this responsibility. Within this family, alcohol was also identified as a coping mechanism passed from one generation to another.

Earlier research shows that unresolved trauma can be transferred (lyengar et al., 2014; Woods-Jaeger et al., 2018). What was more evident is that most participants made conscious and deliberate efforts to prevent the transmission of trauma and harmful behaviours to the next generation. They were aware of the social environments that may cause their children harm and try to shield them from those environments. This finding is also consistent with earlier findings where parents described the role of social environments in the generational transmission of ACE (Woods-Jaeger et al., 2018). Parents aspired to make their children's lives better and desired to break the cycle of trauma by supporting their children and building resilience in them. These findings also relate to attachment reorganisation, which refers to a process whereby those with unresolved trauma transition towards secure attachments through their increased understanding and the resolution of trauma (Iyengar et al., 2019). This may include previous and current trauma.

In earlier works, lyengar et al., (2014) showed that unresolved trauma may inhibit a mother's expectations and perceptions of her child, as well as her ability to sensitively respond to the child. This can compromise the development of secure attachment in the child (lyengar et al., 2014). However, children of mothers with unresolved trauma who were reorganising to secure attachments were found to be securely attached. Thus, the mothers who were aware of their experiences and made conscious decisions to parent differently and form better relationships were reorganising to form secure attachments.

Abused children usually become perpetrators of abuse in their adult lives, passing down trauma from one generation to another (World Health Organization, 2020a). Maternal trauma history and depressive symptoms during pregnancy were associated with maladaptive infant socioemotional symptoms. Maternal ACE has been linked with adverse health outcomes for women in South Africa. In a study at a KwaZulu Natal hospital, Bhengu et al. (2020) found that ACE plays a role in women's perinatal substance use outcomes. A mother's use of substances affects a child's development. Maternal socioeconomic status, marital status, and age have also been associated with experiencing at least one form of ACE (Manyema & Richter, 2019). Single mothers' marital status has been associated with children experiencing more ACE when compared with children from dual-partner families (either married or live-in partners) (Manyema & Richter, 2019). Furthermore, trauma such as emotional neglect in childhood (Talmon et al., 2019) and unresolved maternal trauma (lyengar et al., 2014) can have adverse effects on self-identity and adult functioning. As shown earlier, self-perception and identity development were themes identified in the struggles of women who experienced adversities in childhood.

Self-identity is an important element in motherhood as social identity as a woman's personal (self) and social identity changes. However, mothers can reorganise these insecure attachments to form secure attachments with their children. Resolved trauma can form secure attachments in the adult child, which indicates resilience. While studies indicate the impact of adversities on children's developmental outcomes, on the victims' later life, and on a societal level, there is a scarcity of research focusing on how adversities shape the adult-child's perception and experiences of motherhood in the South African context. My findings add to the debates on continuities and discontinuities of maltreatment among those who themselves experienced child abuse (Cicchetti & Valentino, 2015; Mcdonnell & Valentino, 2016) although the women's relationships with their children warrant further exploration. What

emerged from the findings was the continuity of maltreatment from the participants' parents and discontinuities from the participants to their children. One of the functions of this discontinuity was the dynamic interaction of the women's personal characteristics, changes in environment, cultural reformations, and their sociocultural context. Within the PPCT model, intergenerational trauma also illustrated the *macrotime* which focuses on how experiences play out over time within and across generations (Koller et al., 2020). Cross-generational experiences of trauma also functioned within the historical events and transitions in South Africa and affected proximal processes within the microsystem.

Protective and Risk Factors

The narratives showed various factors that contributed to emotional distress in the participants' adult lives and more so concerning motherhood. Certain protective mechanisms were used in attempts to manage or mitigate these challenges. The risk and protective factors are discussed concerning the participant's life course. They will show factors in their childhood and current factors influencing their adaptability. These findings suggest that social circumstances, including interpersonal relationships, and participation in the community are important coping mechanisms when faced with adversity (Moodley, 2014). Protective factors of adverse outcomes included religion, exposure to education, consistent caregivers, effective coping mechanisms, and professional resources. Research indicates that protective factors, such as social networks or spiritual resources, development could be promoted even in the face of adversity (Larkin et al., 2014).

Risk Factors

Risk factors include unresolved trauma, avoidant and dissociative behaviours, unhealthy relationships, and environments. In all cases in this study, the family context, including structure and functioning, played an important role in the participants being

exposed to adversities. In some cases, living arrangements were the main contributing factors leading to a child's vulnerability to abuse. For example, Fezile's family dynamics led to her not being raised by her parents and led to the constant changes in her living arrangements. Her changing living arrangements led to her exposure to abuse and maltreatment. Likewise, Khanyi's living arrangements exposed her to abuse within her extended family. In addition, taking responsibility for her siblings at a young age robbed her of her own childhood. This follows earlier literature showing the link between family structures and children's exposure to adversities in South Africa (Makiwane et al., 2017; Ndagurwa & Nzimande, 2016; Taliep et al., 2018). Family functioning is also linked to children's exposure to adversities and may lead to patterns of trauma within the family (Vervoort-Schel et al., 2021; Woods-Jaeger et al., 2018). The cycles of generational trauma were evident when the participants' parents experienced family dynamics that exposed them to trauma or adversities in childhood. Participants spoke about their parents' families of origin and the family dysfunctions that may have negatively affected their parents and resulted in the patterns they experienced in their childhood. Strict parenting practices seemed common in the historical and social context in which these women were raised. In addition, the emergence of a working class of mothers shifted parenting dynamics and perpetuated patterns of parenting across generations. Moreover, children's responses to risk factors varies. This was evident in how the participants positioned their siblings who were exposed to similar contexts and in some cases the same adversities. The biological aspect of the bioecological model can explain some of the differences in responses to the same stressors.

Furthermore, the living arrangements of participants in the current study were often associated with socioeconomic, parental marital status, and related cultural factors. In three narratives, the parents were not married, and the children lived intermittently with grandparents and other relatives. In many African cultures, the children born out of wedlock

often live with the maternal family. Moreover, in Moloko's narrative, her parents later got married; however, when they both died, the paternal family only requested the boy child, leaving the girls with the maternal family. She cited culture as the reason for this separation, although other family dynamics may have been at play in this instance. In one case, an additional risk factor was the community factors related to alcoholism and socioeconomic factors. Within this mining community, children were exposed to alcoholism and violence. In line with the ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979a, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994), the multiple systems in which the children interacted (directly or indirectly) produced various factors related to children's experiences of adversity.

The above discussion of risk factors is related mainly to the participants' childhood and exposure to adversities. In their adulthood, risk factors were predominantly associated with unresolved trauma and the participants' current stressors, such as unemployment. Individual factors were identified as mental health risk factors. Some women struggled to process and overcome the painful past, the impact of familial dynamics and rejection, and had challenges in coping with life's adversities. They used avoidance as a coping mechanism to shield themselves from distressing memories. This indicates a lack of engagement or introspection regarding their childhood experiences. The women suppressed their childhood memories, which was evident in their reflections guided by the prompts to describe their childhood and recall a memorable event from their childhood. The women had previously avoided discussing their childhood; however, they found the interviews to be a safe space to break their silence. Suppressing these memories can be a form of dissociation, which can have negative effects on one's ability to process experiences. A mother's dissociation from traumatic experiences is central to the intergenerational transmission of trauma (Bradfield, 2011).

Current stressors were identified as risk factors intersecting with the women's childhood trauma and influencing their well-being as well as their parenting. For example, Khanyi did not connect how her childhood impacts her parenting. Still, she focused on how her current divorce and unemployment have affected her ability to provide for and support her children.

Protective Factors

In contrast to the familial risk factors identified above, familial strength was recognised as a protective factor for some participants. For example, the close family relationships within Hope's family offered them a source and a buffer against adverse outcomes. In Moloko's case, her mother's family rallied together to support her financially and assist her to achieve academically in the absence of both her parents. Family strength also includes parents' aspirations to make their children's lives better in the context of trauma and parents' responsive caregiving practices (Woods-Jaeger et al., 2018). Caregiver support is a critical mediator in children's adaptation to victimisation (Cook et al., 2005) and plays a role in the developmental outcomes into adulthood. The availability of a consistent caregiver was identified as a strong factor in how some participants adapted and coped with adversities. These consistent adults provided resilience promoting factors such as expressions of love and nurturance as well as material support in some cases. In times of severe stress, a caregiver or parent can assist children to regulate effectively and help build the child's resilience (Boullier & Blair, 2018). Consistent with other findings, positive childhood experiences (PCEs) were an important protective factor in mitigating adversity (Seya et al., 2024). In the current study women reflected on these positive experiences in relation to memorable events they recalled. These often-included experiences where there were expressions of love in various forms as well as their relationship with one parent.

In the absence of such protective factors, the enduring stress may lead to dysregulation and may have enduring consequences on the child's system neurological, endocrine and immune systems function (Boullier & Blair, 2018).

Some participants identified resources and strategies to build resilience and counteract the negative effects of emotional distress. In contrast to dissociation and silencing, some women where conscious of their experiences and how they impact their parenting, this mentalisation meant that they sought help and consciously built resilience. As indicated earlier in this chapter, some women made conscious efforts to break the cycles of abuse and to protect their children. Consistent with earlier findings, resilience promoting factors included open communication with children, expressions of love, and close family relationships (Woods-Jaeger et al., 2018). I define resilience according to Masten (2011, p. 494), as referring to "the capacity of dynamic systems to withstand or recover from significant challenges that threaten its stability, viability, or development". However, the focus is on the developing individual and their capacity to adapt and recover and form better relationships with their children. Patterns and pathways of positive adjustment in the women's childhood included the availability of consistent caregivers.

The women were able to reorganise and form better attachments with their children and to transform negative experiences into positive actions. One mother intended to shield her children from witnessing her own emotional distress reflects her awareness of the potential impact on her children's well-being. Mothers showed an ability to imagine or consider the subjective experiences of their children. This mentalisation has been considered to facilitate self-regulation and has implications for affect-regulation (Ensink et al., 2016). A parent's mentalisation is associated with their children's behavioural outcomes. Parent's mentalising stance in the context of child sexual abuse is particularly important for reducing child externalising difficulties (Ensink et al., 2016). This finding relates to the child's

psychological well-being and can have positive outcomes for the mother child relationship. The ability to mentalise suggests the mother's 'person characteristics' alluding to developmentally generative (promote development) propensities (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). However, in some cases women overcompensated for their own childhood by sacrificing themselves as mothers to provide for and protect their children. While this behaviour protects children, it may be detrimental to the mothers' well-being alluding to developmentally disruptive inclinations. Developmentally disruptive characteristics or behaviours can hinder proximal processes which will require "progressively more complex patterns of reciprocal interaction over extended periods of time" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 810).

Another important protective factor was how the women made sense of and reconstructed their understanding of the past. For example, Boitumelo perceived her mother's treatment as being abusive, and now as a mother she interprets the experience differently and ascribes new meaning to it. She, however, struggled to come to terms with the sexual abuse she experienced which led to her teenage pregnancy. Sometimes, the women contextualised their parents' behaviours by showing an understanding of how their parents' own suffering informed their parenting. Individuals who were able to articulate the impact of their childhood on how they now parent were able to also reflect on the good and the bad. These findings are consistent with previous research on reorganising from insecure to secure attachment in women who experienced childhood trauma (Iyengar et al., 2019). Based on their discourse in interviews, women were reorganising to secure attachments while still retaining some aspects of their unresolved trauma. An example of this is how Matsie described her father's strict parenting as being harmful but maintaining that she has adopted a similar parenting style which she sees as being both negative and positive. She reflects on the positive and negative aspects of this parenting style on herself and on her children. She

describes her father as having “a heavy hand” but also narrates that of her siblings she is the only one who thinks her father was “normal”. Attachment reorganisation has been identified as a potential protective factor in mothers with unresolved trauma and a buffer against the transmission of trauma (Iyengar et al., 2019; lyengar et al., 2014). In line with the bioecological model the above discussion indicates generative person characteristics which Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) call *directive belief systems.* As the women grew up and developed into adulthood, they were able to conceptualise their experiences and those of others. Furthermore, the ability to reflect on one’s experiences with appropriate anger and not to internalize the traumatic experience has the ability to halt intergenerational transmissions of maltreatment (Cicchetti & Valentino, 2015).

The environmental context can offer sources of resilience and support or be a hinderance to development (Larkin et al., 2014). The current findings showed various resources from positive environments such as church and school, where participants received support during their childhood. Most participants were active in and received support from their churches. These findings support the supposition that children’s resilience can be built through social integration (Boullier & Blair, 2018). Indeed, churches are an alternative source of support for families in South Africa instead of extended families (Makiwane et al., 2017). In line with the properties of the bioecological model, the findings highlight the role of others (caregivers, teachers, peers, congregation) in developmental activities. The involvement of people functioning in these supportive roles is not limited to the formative years, however as a person develops role players in proximal processes may change.

Some participants in my study also spoke of their relationship with God in their adult lives as a source of hope. However, the introduction to religious affiliations often came from their families of origin. Religion and spirituality play an important role in assisting them to cope with their trauma experiences during their childhood. Going to church offered some an

escape from their experiences at home and gave them a sense of hope. These findings are in tandem with other studies linking religiosity or spirituality to resilience factors buffering against adverse effects of trauma and adversities (Moodley, 2014; Schwalm et al., 2022; Upenieks, 2021). However, religiosity changes through a person's life course. Religious comfort was reported to be a coping mechanism for adults with a history of child abuse, while religious service attendance did not buffer against stress (Upenieks, 2021). In my study, the women attended church in their childhood and formed deeper personal connections only in their adulthood.

Education also played an important role in the narratives of hope for a better future. One participant spoke of the good schools she was exposed to and how her education gave her the hope of a better future. She therefore 'hid' herself in reading and going to church. Another participant went to good schools that offered psychological services to learners. Counselling services were identified as a resource available to help buffer against the effect of ACE, although only two participants made use of these services as mothers. Others discussed their desire to use these services and their needs, however they were hindered by the financial implications. Therefore, socioeconomic factors also play an important role in the resources one can have access to. The mental health treatment gap in South Africa and the disparities in the access to mental health care have been reported on (Docrat et al., 2019; Sorsdahl et al., 2023). The availability of health services reflects the exosystem as the context in which families function (Cicchetti & Valentino, 2015). The inaccessibility of services for children who experience trauma places them at risk for adverse mental health outcomes.

The availability of therapeutic services in educational settings as indicated by one participant highlights the role of schools as an important site for the delivery of mental health promotion and prevention programmes (Petersen et al., 2012). There is an interplay of multiple risk and protective factors influencing mental health, including biological and

genetic factors, proximal interpersonal and environmental factors, political, economic, social and cultural factors, necessitating an ecological approach to mental health promotion and prevention in South Africa (Petersen et al., 2012). Thus, the protective and risk factors discussed here should not be understood in silo, however they show an interaction of systems affecting mental health and other developmental outcomes. The risk and protective factors discussed here support the notion that no single factors or set of factors cause maltreatment (Cicchetti & Valentino, 2015). Childhood adversities result from intersecting factors within the child's ecosystem. Furthermore, proximal processes functioned as a buffer in the presence of adversities and operated in conjunction with characteristics of the individual and their environment (Darling, 2007).

Conclusion

In this chapter I aimed to discuss the themes identified across the cases presented and to interpret the themes in line with literature and theory. The exploration of upbringing experiences among the participants revealed a nuanced interplay between stability and instability, particularly in the context of mobility and family structures. I highlighted the role of fathers in the participants' lives, which brought forth complex narratives marked by variations in involvement, absence, and disengagement. The multifaceted nature of fatherhood emerged as a central theme, intricately linked to historical, cultural, and economic factors in this context. The narratives revealed insight into maternal identity in the context of histories of adverse childhood experiences and how mothers reconstruct what motherhood means. Protective and mental health risk factors were identified which showed the interconnectedness of biological, environmental, social, and cultural factors in mental health promotion and prevention.

Chapter 14: Conclusion

Introduction

This final chapter provides conclusions from the findings and outlines this study's contributions. I also clarify the limitations of the study and give recommendations for future research and practice. The main aim of this study was to explore how adverse childhood experiences and contextual factors shape motherhood in a sample of Black South African mothers. I was interested in how women with a history of ACE construct motherhood and position themselves concerning others in their social context. The objectives of the study were thus (a) to explore how women who experienced adversities in their childhood position themselves as mothers; (b) to understand how women who experienced adversities in their childhood construct motherhood and the factors shaping their constructions; (c) to identify the mental health risk factors for mothers who experienced childhood adversities; and (d) to identify mental health protective factors for mothers with a history of childhood adversities. To reach these objectives, I followed the qualitative research approach and employed Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. I followed the case study research design and collected data through interviews and reflective documents. I interviewed eight mothers who experienced varying forms of adversity in their childhood.

Contribution of the study

Prevalence studies and retrospective reports reviewed in this study show how common and cumulative ACEs are in developed and developing countries. This study added to the literature on ACEs and motherhood by shedding light on Black women's experiences in South Africa. One of the study's aims was to explore how women with a history of ACE construct motherhood and the factors that shape their constructions. The findings show that women's constructions are informed by their childhood experiences and other circumstances

in their adulthood such as their socioeconomic factors and current relationships. Their realities and health challenges are based on personal, environmental, and societal contexts. Women constructed motherhood in line with the dominant ideology of intense motherhood while exercising agency (Autret et al., 2023; Hays, 1997). Positioning of self in relation to others showed varied perceptions of maternal efficacy and the idealised role of motherhood.

My study contributes to the limited body of knowledge on motherhood in South Africa and the intersectional experiences of women (Frizelle, 1999; Frizelle & Kell, 2010; Mograbi et al., 2023; Moore, 2013; Parry, 2022; Spjeldnæs, 2021; Spjeldnæs et al., 2014). In the field of psychology, this study highlights the mental health needs of mothers who have a history of childhood trauma adding to the understanding of intergenerational trauma. The findings show how the interpretation of victimisation experiences influences current maternal behaviours. This contributes to the body of research which shows the long-lasting impact of childhood adversity on women with a history of various traumas (Fenerci et al., 2016; Mathijssen et al., 2024; Mcdonnell & Valentino, 2016; Plant et al., 2018; Sun et al., 2017; Talmon et al., 2019). In the South African context, the study addressed the gap in research on women's experiences of motherhood in the context of previous childhood traumas.

While patterns of trauma were seen in the women's childhoods and how they positioned their parents, these women employed certain mechanisms to break these cycles. The findings highlight the importance of making meaning from previous trauma and the ability to mentalise to break the cycle of trauma. While this is a trait within these mothers, these abilities interacted with other factors within their ecosystem such as education and religion. These are reciprocal interactions highlighted in Bronfenbrenner's work and the active participation of humans in their development (Shelton, 2018). Based on the findings I conclude fathers as well as family structures are important in children's lives and their exposure to childhood trauma. The findings revealed the role of fathers in the participants'

lives, which brought forth complex narratives marked by variations in involvement, absence, and disengagement. Economic factors, cultural practices like lobola, and socio-cultural dynamics have influenced fathers' ability to be present in their children's lives, contributing to instances of absence and disengagement. The economic disadvantage faced by Black men adds another layer of complexity to the dynamics of fatherhood. This is underpinned by South Africa's historical background and the separation of families due to work, further contextualising the participants' experiences. This study contributes retrospective accounts of women's experiences with their fathers, adding nuances to how fatherhood is understood in South Africa. The findings on protective and mental health risk factors within the narratives painted a comprehensive picture of the complex interplay of various elements shaping emotional well-being, particularly in the context of motherhood.

Limitations

This study is marked by a few key limitations. The main limitation I identified relates to methodological issues within qualitative research, particularly case study research and the use of reflection documents. Here I will not outline all the issues associated with qualitative research or case study methods as indicated in various publications such as by Bromley (1986) and Verschuren, (2003). Issues in scholarship often relate to validity and the lack of generalisability of case study research. The findings represented experiences of middle-class women, and do not reflect lower-class women in South Africa who could benefit from such studies. Nevertheless, this study by design did not aim to generalise, but to look at the unique experiences of mothers with a history of childhood adversities within their varied contexts. The study focused on deepening the understanding of motherhood as opposed to quantifying the data (Almeida et al., 2017). However, the study could have benefited from a larger sample allowing for comparisons from more cases. To this end, the measures of

trustworthiness were discussed in Chapter 4. The comparative analysis provided analytical rigour to the case study.

There were limitations in terms of sampling and the recruitment of participants given the sensitive nature of the topic. Although issues of psychological distress were mitigated by offering counselling services, there was an unwillingness from women to open old wounds. Indeed, those who are suffering find it difficult to communicate what they are going through or have gone through (Segalo, 2012).

Furthermore, the study did not include all forms of adversities identified in the ACEs questionnaires. A wider range of adversities could have resulted in a much more varied sample. In addition, the study was based on participants' recollection of events and was open to recall bias. Although I had provided prompting questions to guide the women in written reflections the women provided limited information. Therefore, the information fitted within certain themes but limited me from using quotations hence the interview data were dominant in the presentation of the findings.

From a theoretical perspective, it proved challenging to maintain all the concepts of Bronfenbrenner's latter conceptualisation of the bioecological theory in all methodological applications. For example, single interviews limited the deeper exploration of the women's life histories. However, other researchers have discussed this challenge of encompassing all the dimensions of the theory in a single study (Koller et al., 2020; Tudge et al., 2009). Moreover, in this study I focused on the aspects of the PPCT that were most relevant and applicable to my inquiry (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Koller et al., 2020).

Recommendations

The study's findings highlighted a need for interventions focusing on mothers with a history of childhood adversities. Prevention, recognition, and interventions are recommended

as effective ways to deal with the harmful effects of ACEs or to prevent their occurrence (Boullier & Blair, 2018). The findings suggested that families are an important source of support therefore maternal mental health interventions at the community level need to integrate family resilience factors. It is to capacitate and build family resilience to protect children and improve women's well-being.

It is recommended that mothers with a history of childhood abuse should be offered psychological therapy or parenting programmes such as the Perinatal Mental Health Project based at the University of Cape Town in South Africa. The Perinatal Mental Health Project (PMHP) strengthens health and social development systems so that maternal mental health care can be provided at large scales (PMHP, 2024). The programme addresses the common mental health conditions amongst pregnant and postnatal women in low-resource settings in South Africa by supporting the integration of quality maternal mental health care into existing mother and child initiatives. It is recommended that maternal mental health be further explored in research and interventions to be prioritised in the local health system. Regarding methodology, further research using longitudinal mixed-method studies with a larger sample of mothers could be beneficial in informing interventions. The mixed method approach will incorporate quantitative measures of ACEs (i.e. ACE questionnaires for adults) and qualitative interviews. Future developmental research on ACEs in the South African context could follow the methodological approach introduced by Koller et al. (2020) which builds upon Bronfenbrenner's theory which also supports longitudinal research. This recommendation addresses the methodological limitation mentioned earlier and would strengthen empirical research in this context.

My study provided valuable insights for comprehending the broader societal landscape and the evolving roles of fathers within African families. Further research is essential to explore contemporary developments and how fathers navigate their roles in

present-day South Africa. I recommend that future studies should focus on the varied experiences of middle- and lower-class Black women and the intersectionality of their experience of motherhood in the context of childhood trauma and adversities. Further research on maternal mental health is needed which centres Black women's voices and experiences to inform decisions regarding their health (Brantley, 2023).

"It's important to clarify that most people who are abused don't go on to abuse others in the same way. On the other hand, it is becoming clear that it's the very rare person who has been abused who doesn't have some form of adaptation that impacts how they deal with people. It doesn't have to be a "pathology", but it can influence the ways in which you form and maintain relationships"

(Bruce Parry, 2021, p.278)

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Appendices

Appendix A: Ethics Certificate

UNISA university of south africa

COLLEGE OF HUMAN SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

04 March 2022

NHREC Registration # :
Rec-240816-052
CREC Reference # :
45596913_CREC_CHS_2022

Dear Ms Itumeleng Montsokolo Lenah

Decision:
Ethics Approval from 04 March 2022 to 04 March 2027

Researcher(s): Name: Ms Itumeleng Montsokolo Lenah
Contact details: 45596913@mylife.unisa.ac.za
Supervisor(s): Name: Prof Papaikonomou
Contact details: 0825777102

Title: Exploring Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) and their effect on motherhood: Perception of the adult-child

Degree Purpose: PhD

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Unisa College of Human Science Ethics Committee. Ethics approval is granted for five years.

The *medium risk application was reviewed by* College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee, in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the College Ethics Review Committee.
3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the

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confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing, accompanied by a progress report.

5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data require additional ethics clearance.
7. No fieldwork activities may continue after the expiry date **(04 March 2027).** Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

*The reference number **45596913_CREC_CHS_2022** should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.*

Yours sincerely,

Signature: pp

Prof. KB Khan
CHS Research Ethics Committee Chairperson
Email: khankb@unisa.ac.za
Tel: (012) 429 8210

Signature: PP

Prof K. Masemola
Exécutive Dean: CHS
E-mail: masemk@unisa.ac.za
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Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Ethics clearance reference number: 45596913_CREC_CHS_2023

2023/05/08

Title: Exploring Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) and their effect on motherhood: perceptions of the adult-child

Dear Prospective Participant

Student research project: Exploring Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) and their effect on motherhood: perceptions of the adult-child

My name is Itumeleng Masisi, and I am doing research with Prof Maria Papaikonomou, a professor and senior lecturer in the Department of Psychology, towards a PhD at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled ***Exploring Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) and their effect on motherhood: perceptions of the adult-child.***

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

I am conducting this research to find out how your childhood experiences and contextual factors shaped your transition to motherhood. I also want to find out what the mental health risks and protective factors are for you as a mother who experienced adversity in your childhood.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You have been invited to participate in this study because your childhood experiences and transition to motherhood are the main interest and focus of this study. You have knowledge and experiences that can assist other children or adults who experienced adversities in the

childhood. You also meet the participation criteria set out for this study, that is being a mother who experienced a form of adversity in your childhood and being between the ages of 25 and 45 years. We are looking for approximately 10 mothers in total from Gauteng and Limpopo to participate in this study. All participants will be recruited using social media advertisements.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

Your role in the research study is that of an informant. You will be required to participate in an interview with the researcher and to write a reflection on your experiences. The personal reflection is guided by the following two questions:

1. When you think of your childhood what comes to your mind?
2. Are there any memorable events from your childhood? (Please share the experience)
3. Describe what motherhood means to you.

The study involves a semi-structured interview that will be audio recorded for transcription. The interview will entail the following questions:

1. How would you describe your childhood?
2. How do you think your childhood experiences shaped or informed your experience as a mother?
3. How did you experience the transition of becoming a mother?
4. What does motherhood mean to you (and why)?
5. What impact do you think your childhood had on your mental health as an adult?
6. What support do you wish you received as a mother?
7. What interventions would you recommend be made available for mothers who experienced adversities in their childhood?

The interview is expected to take and hour (60 minutes), while the reflective document will depend on your process of writing.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

Participation in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If 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. Should you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time before the analysis of the research results.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

The benefit of participating is that you will have a space to share your experiences of childhood trauma and motherhood. A benefit for the field of psychology that your experiences will provide knowledge that can be useful in interventions for mothers who have experience trauma in the childhood. Your participation will provide enhance research on Black mothers and traumatic childhoods in South Africa.

ARE THEIR ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?

The topic being explore is of a sensitive nature and may evoke emotional and possibility psychological responses from you if you who have not dealt with previous trauma or have unresolved trauma. However, the research questions do not dwell much on the traumatic events themselves, but much on motherhood and your transition to adulthood. In case you experience re-traumatisation or need psychological services, you will be referred to pro bono psychological provision through Tshemba Psychological Services http://tshemba.co.za/.

WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

The data (interview audio and reflective documents) will be accessible to me (the researcher) and my supervisor and will be used only for the purpose of this research. However, additional people such as a transcriber and co-coder will have access to the data. In case these service providers are utilized in the study, an indemnity form will be signed by each consultant. 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.

The transcribed interviews will be anonymous and will not reflect your name or link back to you. No identifying information will be used in the write-up of the thesis or in any other publications from the study. A pseudonym will be given, and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings.

HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

Hard copies of the interview recording, transcripts and reflective documents will be stored by the researcher for a minimum period of five years in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet at the University premises for future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored on a password protected cloud storage. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. Hard copies will be shredded, and electronic copies will be permanently deleted from the hard cloud storage.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

Please note that there is no incentive for your participation in the study. You will incur the cost of travel should you prefer to meet the researcher at an agreed location of your choice. In case of online interview you will incur the costs for your own data.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL?

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the *College of Human Sciences,* 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 Itumeleng Masisi on 0124298644 or email 45596913@mylife.unisa.ac.za. The findings are accessible for 5 years. Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any

aspect of this study, please contact 0124298644, masisim@unisa.ac.za/45596913@mylife.unisa.ac.za.

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact papaim@unisa.ac.za/ 012) 429 8266. Contact the research ethics chairperson of the College Ethics Review Committee Prof Khan (khankb@unisa.ac.za) if you have any ethical concerns.

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Itumeleng Masisi
Research Student

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) 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 (if applicable).

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 of the semi-structured interview.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname…… (please print)

Participant Signature……..Date……

Researcher's Name & Surname……(please print)

Researcher's signature……..Date……

Appendix C: Declaration of Confidentiality

Declaration of Confidentiality

I undertake to provide transcription and co-coding servers to Ms. Itumeleng Masisi (PhD candidate). I understand the nature of her research and ethical standards required.

I understand that, as transcriber and co-coder, I will be exposed to confidential information and sensitive information about the participants in this research study.

I acknowledge that it is my responsibility to respect the privacy and confidentiality of this information. I will not access, use, or disclose any confidential information from the audio recordings or the transcripts. I understand that breaching this agreement may result in legal action being taken against me.

_____

Transcriber/Co-coder's Name (Please Print)

_____

Signature

_____

Date

Appendix E: Recruitment Advertisement