

Exploring the Identity Formation Experiences of a Group of Women who became Mothers during Adolescence

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*Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of*

Master of Education in Educational Psychology (MEd Psych)

in the Faculty of Education

at

Stellenbosch University

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April 2022

Declaration

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Acknowledgements

'Waar daar hoop was, is daar ook nou seën'

- Most importantly, I want to thank my Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, without whom this journey would not have been possible: *'I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.'* (2 Tim 4:7)
- Liefste Pappa en Mamma, woorde sal nooit kan beskryf hoe baie ek julle leiding, omgee en liefde waardeer nie. Dankie dat julle elke tree saam my gestap het. Julle bystand het my deurgedra!
- My friends, I would like to express my deepest appreciation for your constant encouragement 'to get this done'.
- Omer, my love, you have been a pillar of strength; thank you for the amazing coffee, your utmost support and continued motivation.
- Dr Lynne Damons, I sincerely thank you for guiding me along every step of this process. The road was bumpy at times, but your wisdom, calmness and patience have been perfect in steering me to the end.
- Ricky Woods, you have been an amazing editor and I could not have done this without your knowledge and expertise. I thank you for being a part of my journey.
- Tannie Nelie Whitehead, dankie vir die ure wat Tannie spandeer het om my data te transkribeer. Die vlak van professionaliteit is uitstaande en ek waardeer dit ongelooflik.
- The National Research Foundation (NRF), and especially to Prof Lesley Wood, the director of Community-based Educational Research (COMBER), I would like to convey my deepest appreciation for the financial support that you afforded me.
- Finally, I want to acknowledge the strength and bravery of the women in Ukomelela. This thesis would not have been possible without you. Thank you for sharing your lived experiences with me and for trusting me with the deepest parts of your stories.

Abstract

Early adolescent motherhood is an increasingly common phenomenon in South Africa, and worldwide. While teenage pregnancy is a well-researched occurrence, very few studies have collaborated with young mothers to reflect on their lived realities of early motherhood. In seeking to address the often marginalised voices of young women in the literature related to the phenomenon, this study collaborated with a group of women who had become mothers during adolescence, in the stories they tell about how their lived realities of early motherhood have influenced their identity formation in a historically marginalised community of the Western Cape. This exploratory study was embedded in the social constructivist, interpretive, and transformative paradigms, using a predominantly qualitative research design, more specifically, community-based participatory action research. Six co-researchers were intentionally selected by making use of purposive sampling with the help of a key informant from the community. Creative arts-based visual methods were used to elicit co-researchers' lived realities by making use of the 'river of life', 'photovoice', collages and clay modelling. In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, traditional forms of face-to-face interactions had to be re-imagined through data generation methods that could be done online. This was a challenging but enriching experience that encouraged honouring the resources, limitations, experiences, and skills, both mine and of the co-researchers. The various methods and theories used in the study afforded triangulation, creating an opportunity to explore data from various vantage points; thereby adding to the rigour of the study. Thematic analysis revealed that the women's experience of pregnancy in adolescence was complex and multifaceted, encompassing aspects of motherhood, identity, community, and resilience. The research findings reflect the daunting new role of motherhood for the young girls. The women identified various phases of identity and described their conflicts and struggles. The study showed each of the women on a journey to create a redemptive identity despite the adversity and marginalisation with which they had dealt. The results further highlight the influence that community factors, both negative and positive, have on the women's lived experiences. The co-researchers, however, alluded to the fact that social support and religious awareness aided their personal growth, resilience, and meaning-making processes. Through this reflective process of the telling and retelling of their lived realities in new and creative ways, the study created a space for the co-researchers to re-imagine their identities. The data generated in this collaborative study added to the limited body of knowledge about how marginalised women inform their identities and has the potential to influence the way in which adolescent mothers are supported.

Keywords: early motherhood, identity formation, resilience, lived experience, creative arts-based data generation techniques

Opsomming

Vroeë adolessente swangerskap is 'n toenemende verskynsel in Suid-Afrika, en wêreldwyd. Terwyl etlike studies binne die raamwerk van tienerswangerskap bestaan, bly daar 'n tekort aan studies relevant aan die geleefde realiteite van vroeë moederskap, vir tieners. In 'n poging om die dikwels gemarginaliseerde stemme van jong vroue in die literatuur verwant aan die bogenoemde verskynsel aan te spreek, het hierdie studie met 'n groep vroue, wat tydens adolessensie moeders geword het, saamgewerk. Hierdie vrouens deel stories oor hoe die geleefde realiteite van vroeë swangerskap bydra tot hulle identiteitsvorming binne 'n histories gemarginaliseerde gemeenskap in die Wes-Kaap. Hierdie ondersoekende-studie is ingebed in die sosiaal-konstruktivistiese, interpretiewe en transformatiewe paradigmas. 'n Oorheersende, kwalitatiewe navorsingsontwerp, meer spesifiek, 'n gemeenskapsgebaseerde en -deelnemende aksienavorsing is gebruik. Ses mede-navorsers is doelbewus geselekteer deur gebruik te maak van doelgerigte steekproefneming met behulp van 'n sleutel informant uit die gemeenskap. Skeppende kuns-gebaseerde visuele metodes is gebruik om mede-navorsers se geleefde realiteite te ontlok, deur gebruik te maak van die 'rivier-van-die-lewe', 'photovoice', 'collages' en klei modellering. Met die Covid-19-pandemie in ag geneem, moes tradisionele vorme van aangesig-tot-aangesig-interaksies herdink word, om datagenereringsmetodes aanlyn gedoen kon word. Dit was 'n uitdagende, maar verrykende ervaring wat die verering van die hulpbronne, beperkings, ervarings en vaardighede van my en die mede-navorsers aangemoedig het. Die verskillende metodes en teorieë wat in die studie gebruik is, het 'n element van triangulasie aangebied, wat 'n geleentheid geskep het om data vanaf verskeie uitkykpunte te verken en sodoende by te dra tot die strengheid van die studie. Tematiese analise het aan die lig gebring dat die vroue se ervaring van swangerskap in adolessensie kompleks en veelvlakkig was. Dit sluit aspekte van moederskap, identiteit, gemeenskap en veerkragtigheid ook in. Die navorsingsbevindings het die skrikwekkende nuwe rol van moederskap vir die jong meisies weerspieël. Die vroue het verskillende fases van identiteit geïdentifiseer en hul eie konflikte en stryde beskryf. Die studie het getoon dat elkeen van die vroue graag 'n verlossende identiteit wou skep, ten spyte van die teëspoed en marginalisering waarmee hulle te doen gehad het. Die resultate van hierdie studie dui op die invloed wat gemeenskapsfaktore, beide negatief en positief, op die vroue se geleefde ervarings het. Die mede-navorsers het egter aangevoer dat sosiale ondersteuning en godsdienstige bewustheid hul persoonlike groei, veerkragtigheid en betekeniskeppingsprosesse aangehelp het. Deur die reflektiewe proses van vertel-en-oorvertel van hul geleefde realiteite op nuwe en kreatiewe maniere, het die studie 'n ruimte geskep waarin mede-navorsers hul identiteite herverbeel het. Die data wat in hierdie samewerkende studie gegenereer is, het bygedra tot die beperkte hoeveelheid kennis oor hoe gemarginaliseerde vroue hul identiteite bepaal en het die potensiaal om die wyse waarop adolessente moeders ondersteun word, te beïnvloed.

Sleutelwoorde: vroeë moederskap, identiteitsvorming, veerkragtigheid, geleefde ervaring, kreatiewe kunsgebaseerde datagenereringstegnieke.

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Chapter 1: Context and Rationale of Study

'Reality is complex, and no single view will be adequate to explain the nature of the complexity within and around us.' (Bell, 1998, p. 181)

1.1 Introduction

The worldwide teenage pregnancy rate is alarming. Even though the literature suggests that the statistics surrounding early motherhood have slightly decreased in the past few years, the number of pregnancies among teenagers between the ages of 15 and 18, are still staggering (Sibeko, 2012; Ghose & John, 2017; Mlambo, 2018). This phenomenon, however, is not particular to South Africa as a global study conducted by Darroch et al. (2016) suggests that around 21 million girls, aged 15 to 19, and around 2 million girls under the age of 15 become pregnant in developing regions every year. They further project that this trajectory will continue unabated unless a significant intervention transpires (Darroch et al., 2016). A 2013 United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA, 2013) report corroborates their findings and forecasts that the greatest proportional increases would be in West, East, Central and Southern Africa. The complex socio-economic and geopolitical conditions prevalent in marginalised communities suggests a measure of increased vulnerability to the development of elevated levels of poverty, lower levels of education and limited access to employment opportunities (UNFPA, 2015; Mohr et al., 2019). A review of the literature suggests that pregnancy in adolescence is more likely to occur in marginalised communities (Franjić, 2018; Plan International, 2019; Wong et al., 2019; World Health Organization, 2020). However, the literature also suggests that the relationship between the variables is complex.

The complex nature of causal factors, however, does not detract from the social, emotional, and physical health risks that becoming pregnant at a young age poses to the adolescent mothers and their children (Ncube, 2009; Panday et al. 2009; Socolov et al., 2016; Whitworth et al., 2017).

Another significant consequence of becoming pregnant while at school, was the possibility of young women remaining trapped in a cycle of poverty because their pregnancy and motherhood often disrupted their immediate and further access to education and training. This, in turn, limited the employment opportunities available to them (Nkosi & Pretorius, 2019).

This phenomenon with its complex nature makes it challenging to develop generic interventions. Psychosocial and culturally complex understandings of what it means to be a woman and at what age one becomes a woman, further complicated how one could begin to address the aforementioned challenges. Traditionally, motherhood plays a significant role in the lives of women. The dominant

discourses related to womanhood and motherhood and the societal expectations attached to the gender assigned roles that accompany those understandings, greatly influence the social, cultural, educational and economic resources to which women of all ages have access (Lundgren et al., 2019).

The complex interplay of the intrinsic and extrinsic variables that influence the way in which young women make meaning of their experience of early motherhood has been widely researched. However, what tended to be under-examined were first-hand accounts of the lived experience and the meaning-making processes of these young mothers.

There was also a gap in research that forefronts the first-hand experiences of early motherhood and how it may have influenced the sense of self or identity formation of young mothers. Identity formation was a significant variable to consider when trying to understand how young women navigate the experience of being an adolescent parent. Cavanaugh and Blanchard-Fields (2011) describe identity as a dynamic, organised, coherent and integrated pattern of self-perception, which is shaped by one's lived experience over time. According to the American Psychological Society (2020a), identity relates to the basic values which guide human beings in their decision-making. Some scholars are of the view that individuals construct who they are and how they want to be known (Giddens, 1991; Yuval-Davis, 2010). Others, however, argue that very few people actively choose their identities; instead, they suggest that one's identity develops over time as a process of internalising the values of one's parents, peers, role models or culture. These values were, in turn, reinforced by the dominant discourse of the time. It is important to understand this process of identity formation, since gaining insight into the process of identity formation or a lack of identity congruence may lead to greater insight around the variables that influence one's certainty around choices and how they impact the setting and pursuit of life goals and navigating adversity (McAdams & McLean, 2013; Cavanaugh & Blanchard-Fields, 2011).

McAdams (2013), however, cautions that it is important to note that one's identity is not just a collection of traits, goals, and plans, and is rather more complex. This concurs with Cavanaugh and Blanchard-Fields (2011, p. 338) that it was 'a story of how the person came into being, where the person has been, where he or she is going and who he or she will become'. The narrative a person creates has a beginning, middle and an anticipated end. These life narratives 'are psychosocial constructions, co-authored by the person himself or herself and the cultural context within which that person's life is embedded and given meaning' (McAdams, 2001, p. 10). In other words, we tell our stories to justify certain choices. It is therefore important when seeking to understand how we can interrupt the trajectory of the staggering number of adolescent pregnancies, to understand how young women sought, what McAdams and McLean (2013) refer to as redemptive meanings, in their suffering and adversity. Furthermore, we should

consider the ways in which we, as researchers, can create spaces to enable narratives that promote agency, resilience and elevated levels of mental health and well-being.

1.2 Background and Context

As we tell our stories to justify certain choices, the redemptive self comes to the foreground (McAdams, 2013). According to McAdams and McLean (2013), narrators who seek redemptive meanings in their suffering and adversity, and who construct narratives that feature agency, tend to display elevated levels of mental health and well-being. Values and beliefs form the context within which actions and narration take place, while culture and community play an imperative role in forming a resilient attitude in the face of adversity (Zautra et al., 2010). Resilience encompasses various elements that promote personal strengths and function as a protective shield from life stresses. The American Psychological Association (2020b) deems resilience to be 'the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress'. These can include poverty, social difficulties, and health problems. For resilience to be demonstrated, both adversity and positive adaptation must be evident (Zautra et al., 2010; Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013). This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

1.3 Motivation for the Research

1.3.1 Problem statement and purpose of the study

The World Health Organization perceives unplanned early motherhood as a public and social health concern since early childbearing was often associated with low education and the increased risk of maternal and infant death (World Health Organization, 2011; Wong et al., 2019). According to Statistics South Africa (StatsSA, 2017), 989 318 births were registered in South Africa in 2017. Of these, 11% were to adolescent girls between the ages of 10 and 19 years. A closer look at the statistics shows that a total of 1 302 babies were born to children aged between 10 to 14 years.

As these young women grow into adulthood, it is vital to understand the impact this experience has on their lives, and how they make meaning and sense of this experience. A review of the literature on identity suggested that people live storied lives and that most adults make sense of their lives through narratives that provide them with a sense of purpose and meaning (McAdams, 2001; McAdams, 2013; McAdams & McLean, 2013). Clinical psychologist Greer (2014) asserts that 'when we write our stories, we stop feeling confused about the events in our lives and thus begin to access the wisdom that we might have lost when we disassociated ourselves from traumatic emotions or insights' (cited in Raab, 2018).

This study, therefore, aimed to explore, **with** a group of women who became mothers during adolescence, how the stories they told themselves and others about their early motherhood have influenced their identities within a historically marginalised community. The voices of marginalised women are often excluded when we reflect on their lived realities; thus, this study sought to create a space in which the participants shed light on their experience of teenage motherhood and how this had influenced how they navigated life.

In the process of the telling and retelling of their stories in new and creative ways, the study hoped to elucidate, for all the participants, how early motherhood had influenced the way in which they perceived themselves and thus created a space in which they could re-imagine their identity. The process and information generated in this collaborative study also had the potential to influence how adolescent mothers were supported in this and other similar communities.

Finally, it hoped to add to the limited body of knowledge about how marginalised women form their identities through the stories they tell within a South African context. I, as the researcher, aimed to give the women in the study a platform to express their unique voices and to give expression to their inner worlds.

1.4 Research Questions

As this study aimed to explore how early motherhood may have influenced the identity formation of a group of young women, it was guided by the following primary research question: **What influence did becoming a mother during adolescence have on the identity formation of a group of women in a marginalised community?**

To explore the research question fully, the following secondary research questions were formulated:

- How do the women view themselves?
- How did early motherhood influence their identity formation?
- Which intrinsic and extrinsic variables have assisted or hindered them in navigating their lives?

1.5 Theoretical Framework

According to Tracy (2020), a theory can be described as 'bundled systems of principles that strive to explain or make sense of certain phenomena' (p. 33). Theories include terms, concepts, models, thoughts, and ideas that guide the researcher to determine what needs to be observed and informs the analysis and interpretation thereof.

The theoretical framework utilised in this study aimed to understand how marginalised women constructed their identities and at the same time fostered resilience in the face of adversity. Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory was used in conjunction with positive psychology, with a special focus on resilience theory, to gain a thorough understanding of the research topic.

Positive psychology aims to explore the positive aspects of human existence and the extent to which people are cognisant of and utilise their strengths. Resilience can be defined as a psychological developmental phenomenon of regaining psychological balance in the face of adversity (Ivtzan et al., 2016). Within positive psychology, the focus is on thriving through adversity by means of resilience. Consequently, adversity is a necessary requirement for resilience to occur. According to Gilligan (2017), adversity may arise from a single event or a chronic condition. The participants in this study all faced early motherhood, which could be viewed as an event that caused, to a certain extent at least, extreme stress and even hardship during a turbulent developmental phase. The focus of the study was on the process of adjustment following the significant adversity experienced by the participants and on how resilience facilitated transformational growth and a redemptive identity. According to Gilligan (2017), events laden with stress and a sense of hopelessness may sometimes have unexpected positive consequences for an individual. The aim was to explore these events collaboratively to make meaning and to discover instances of resilience.

Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory is often used to describe the person, context, and time, which all function as proximal processes. The proximal process is defined as the development that happens because of reciprocal interaction between the person and the people or occurrences in their immediate environment (Tudge et al., 2009). Thus, the bio-ecological systems theory holds that we encounter different environments throughout our lifespan that may influence our behaviour to varying degrees, namely the micro-, meso-, exo-, macro- and chronosystems.

These systems are in constant interaction with one another, which results in change, growth, and development (Ebersohn & Bouwer, 2015; Swart & Pettipher, 2019). The **microsystem** consisted of the participants' families or work environments in which they interacted with other individuals daily. These direct and constant interactions had significant effects on the development of participants' psychological resilience. The **mesosystem** included interactions and relationships between microsystems. These interactions provided social support and functioned as a buffer to counter adversity. Therefore, the **mesosystem** was invaluable and played an integral part in the adaptation and positive development of the self. The **exosystem** consisted of the institutional milieu in which participants found themselves, but in which they were not active participants. These included social services, community resources and the media. The **macrosystem** referred to the dominant social and economic structures, which included

ideologies and attitudes within a culture or society. All these previously mentioned systems functioned within a broader **chronosystem**, which encompassed change or consistency over time (Wang et al., 2013; Swart & Pettipher, 2019; Shelton, 2019).

In this research study, I aimed to create a balanced view of the participants by including the impact on their identity formation at all systemic levels while incorporating the influence of protective factors (Swart & Pettipher, 2019). By identifying protective factors and resources within the environment and the self, aspects of resilience were distinguishable.

1.6 Key Concepts

In the following section, important key concepts are defined as they form an integral part of the bio-ecological systems theory which encompasses this research study.

1.6.1 Early Motherhood

For the purpose of this study, early motherhood can be defined as a woman under the age of eighteen, who becomes pregnant and bears a child/children. This includes young girls below the age of twelve. The pregnancy may be planned or unplanned and the marital status of the women is not a considering factor.

1.6.2 Identity

Identity can be understood as 'a personal cognitive structure self-defining the individual, consisting of elements that the individual deems relevant to who he or she is' (Cieciuch & Topolewska, 2017). Therefore, the women in the study will be defining themselves using elements that they deem necessary to them as individuals. This may include beliefs and events about themselves, or a historical view of others' incorporated beliefs. Hence, identity as a cognitive structure includes various elements through which a person may define themselves. Individuals, therefore, play an integral role in the self-construction of their identities, which lead to certain behaviours and actions.

1.6.3 Redemptive identity

According to McAdams (2006, p. 81), the redemptive identity is a life narrative characterised by 'the deliverance from suffering to an enhanced status or position in life'. The redemptive identity is furthermore linked to personal growth and resilience (Kim, 2019). A crucial aspect of communication of the redemptive identity to others is understanding who we are, the values we hold dear and the meanings we attribute to our lived experiences.

1.6.4 Resilience

Resilience is the concept that individuals can bounce back from adversity and is linked to protective factors such as hardiness, positive emotions, extraversion, self-efficacy, spirituality, self-esteem and positive affect (Ivtzan et al., 2016). Resilience, therefore, promotes personal well-being. Resilience is the 'successful adaptation to adversity' that leads to 'healthier outcomes following stressful circumstances' (Zautra et al., 2010, p. 3). The American Psychological Association (2020b) considers resilience to be the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems, or workplace and financial stressors.

1.6.5 Self-understanding

Self-understanding is a concept often referred to in this reflective study and can be defined as a deeper level of self-awareness. Self-understanding affords the women in the study to not only gain insight into the self but goes beyond this, to a level of understanding about the choices they made and the reasoning behind them. It creates a space for meaning-making as well as meaning integration into who the self truly is (Hannush, 2021).

1.6.6 Community

According to Banks et al. (2013), the word community refers to 'a group of people with some (but not all) characteristics in common [...] or who share a common identity, interest or practice' (p. 264). According to Stewart and Townley (2020), a community can be distinguished by four distinct elements. Firstly, within a community, there needs to be a binding force such as shared history or common goals. Secondly, members require a sense of belonging and acceptance within their respective communities. Within a community social support and reciprocity to support each other's needs are essential. Individuals within a community often work towards a common goal and establish their own rules and ways of being, which fosters collaboration.

1.6.7 Marginalised

In this study, the word 'marginalised' was carefully chosen as it represents an integrated aspect of the participants' expressed identities that encompass more than just low socio-economic status. According to Baah, Teitelman and Riegel (2019), communities and community members who experience marginalisation are those who are often excluded from the social, economic, educational, and cultural life of the greater community. The authors further expressed that marginalisation often occurred due to unequal power relationships within society, which links to the transformative paradigm (see section 3.5.3).

1.7 Context of the Study

The study was conducted with a group of women in the peri-urban community of Ukomelela in the Western Cape, South Africa. Ukomelela is a small, high-risk community situated approximately 60 kilometres from Cape Town and has a population of only 8 496 people. The community is plagued with various social issues such as drug and alcohol abuse, gangsterism, crime, unemployment, and teenage pregnancy (Ludidi, 2019; Siketsha, 2019; Siketsha, 2020; Ukomelela Community Empowerment Project, 2020). Most households are headed by single mothers, and therefore women play an integral part in the community.

Six women formed part of the study to explore how they have navigated becoming mothers during their adolescence and how this experience has impacted their identity formation and life choices. Access to the research community was gained with the help of a key informant who is an active member of a women empowerment initiative in the community. It is important to note that this study delimited itself to the experiences of marginalised women in the research context and does not presume to speak for all women who have become mothers during adolescence within the community or in the broader South African context.

1.8 Research Methodology

Research methodology is concerned with the philosophical underpinnings of a research study. It is related to how a researcher utilises logical links to study the research topic. Methodology is, therefore, the specific approach or knowledge base from which the researcher will conduct the study (McGregor & Murnane, 2010; Cibangu, 2010; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

1.8.1 Paradigm

A paradigm is central to the research design and represents a frame of reference used to view the world. A paradigm is thus a set of beliefs about reality that shape worldview and informed methods of data collection, observation, and interpretation (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Babbie & Mouton, 2013).

For this study, a qualitative research approach was used. Qualitative research aims to explore social phenomena from the participants' points of view within a natural setting (Creswell, 2014). This enabled me to create a space where the participants may have freedom of expression and share their experiences to make meaning.

The basic qualitative study was mainly positioned in a social constructivist paradigm. Within social constructivism, the ontology or reality is socially constructed and there are no absolute truths about human behaviour. There are thus multiple realities and various interpretations of experiences and events (Merriam, 2002). According to Marshal & Rossman (2016), realities are dependent on context and are continually shaped through interaction with the social world. This paradigm was chosen since the research study was concerned with how women constructed their identities through narratives and how this construction influenced their resilience. Each participant had their own meaning, experience, and worldview, which encouraged rich descriptions and valued meaning-making. Participants were considered to be experts in their own lives.

Within social constructivism, the epistemology or the nature of knowledge is considered to be subjective and both the researcher and participants are responsible for creating knowledge during the entire research process (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Social constructivism regards objectivity as impossible and indicates that facts can 'never be impartial but are always the product of a question and a set of assumptions' (Burr, 2003, p. 152). The participants' unique thoughts, feelings and experiences are products of systems of meaning that function on a social level instead of on an isolated, individual level (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). In this study, collaborative inquiry was used as the research process was informed by the needs and aims of the participants. According to Bridges and McGee (2011), collaborative inquiry emphasises 'inclusive participation within a mutually beneficial research project where deep interpretive processes occur and members' co-construct knowledge' (p. 213).

In this study, the constructivist worldview was used in combination with the interpretivist and transformative paradigm to create rich descriptions. An interpretivist paradigm is often used in combination with constructivism since they both assume that reality is socially constructed (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Interpretivism was included for its multiple, realistic, and context-bound description, understanding and interpretation of reality (Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, a single phenomenon may have various interpretations since humans interpret their world uniquely and then act accordingly. The interpretive paradigm allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the research phenomenon as well as the complexities surrounding the inimitable social context (Pham, 2018).

The transformative paradigm, on the other hand, leads to research that can be influenced by a variety of philosophies and theories, with the common theme of emancipation and transformation of marginalised communities through group action. Creswell (2014) believes that research should contain 'an action agenda for reform that may change [the] lives of the participants, the institutions in which individuals work or live, and the researcher's life' (p. 38). Therefore, from a transformative paradigm, research was

required to address important social issues in collaboration with participants, to avoid further marginalising the population. Thus, a voice of reform and change was used by the research population.

1.8.2 Research design

A predominant qualitative research design, more specifically, participatory action research (PAR), was used in this study. Action research is a 'dynamic educative process, an approach to social investigation, and an approach to taking action to address a problem or to engage in socio-political action' (MacDonald, 2012, p. 36). PAR, particularly community-based participatory action research (CBPAR), differs from traditional research in that those who are traditionally seen as the research subjects (those under study) become partners in the research process, thus co-researchers as they are "joint contributors" and "investigators" in the research study (Boylorn, 2008, p. 600; Herr & Anderson, 2015).

In addition, CPAR is an approach that is appropriate and effective for engaging communities in reflecting on their realities and considering alternative ways of dealing with the challenges they encounter (Zuber-Skerritt, 2015). The focus of this study was therefore on developing the research experience as a space that sought to enable co-researchers to gain self-confidence in their ability to communicate and have their experiences and voices acknowledged while engaging with the various data generation techniques. Encouraging the voice of co-researchers in collaborative research allows the researcher to gain insight into the experiences of the co-researchers and to create an opportunity for the co-researchers to reflect on these experiences and on how they influence their lived realities. Added self-awareness allowed co-researchers to move toward resilience and encouraged shared ownership that evoked social change.

The role of the researcher is not just to study the phenomenon but to foster positive change and skills development in the community. To this end, the study sought to collaborate with the co-researchers in the hope that by reflecting on their experiences retrospectively, they would share their experiences and how these influenced their identity formation. The participants thus became co-researchers of the knowledge which enabled self-efficacy in addressing their practical concerns (Kusago & Miyamoto, 2014).

1.8.3 Co-researcher sampling

Since qualitative research seeks to understand the meaning of a phenomenon from the viewpoint and experiences of the participants involved, co-researchers were sampled according to the research topic and because they were able to provide rich descriptions of the phenomenon under study (Wassenaar, 2010; Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As the study sought to offer rich descriptions of how motherhood during adolescence influenced women's identity formation and perceptions of resilience, six co-researchers were intentionally selected via non-probability sampling. This type of sampling implied

that co-researchers were selected owing to their availability and knowledge of the research topic (Creswell, 2014).

Within non-probability sampling, purposive sampling was used as it enabled the researcher to select co-researchers who were able to provide sufficient in-depth information about the phenomenon under study (Cohen & Manion, 2011; Patton, 2015). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016, p. 96), purposive sampling assumes that the researcher 'wants to discover, understand and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned'. However, given the sensitive nature of the topic and the fact that it was challenging to access such a vulnerable population, snowball sampling was utilised to gain access to new information-rich cases that would otherwise have gone unnoticed (Nieuwenhuis, 2010). This strategy was employed as it involved identifying co-researchers who met the inclusion criteria and collaborating with them to gain access to other co-researchers who also met the criteria (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

For the researcher to select co-researchers, selection criteria were first determined (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). The criteria for inclusion in this study were women, older than 18 years of age, who became pregnant during their adolescence, who had already left the education system at the time of the research, and who resided within the Ukomelela community. I hoped to obtain a sample of between six and eight co-researchers. A small sample size is considered acceptable in qualitative research as the study aimed to provide in-depth knowledge of the phenomenon at hand as long as it offered 'expected reasonable coverage' (Patton, 2015, p. 314). While a small sample size is acceptable in qualitative research, I was aware that it might influence the generalisability of the findings.

1.8.4 Recruitment of co-researchers

I contacted a key informant working in a Women and Community Development Initiative who had been identified by my supervisor as a key role player. I then had a meeting with this individual community member. At the initial meeting, I explained the purpose of my study and outlined my research process. In addition, I shared my knowledge of the community-driven women support group and explored the viability of attending meetings held by these groups and possibly doing a presentation about the proposed research study in the future. I remained open to the guidance I received from her regarding my intended strategy. I am of the view that this initial consultation was valuable in guiding how I prepared for the introductory session, particularly how information could be communicated effectively so that it is accessible to the potential co-researchers. I also intended, at that stage, to highlight the motivation for and the focus of the study. This was included in a short experiential introduction to the data generation techniques that I intended to use in the study.

Additionally, I informed the potential co-researchers that participation was voluntary and would in no way influence their continued participation in their respective women's groups. I also addressed their right to privacy and the way in which I would attempt to anonymise the context and the co-researchers themselves. At the end of the introductory session, I informed the potential co-researchers that they could indicate their willingness to participate in the research by providing me with contact details (a form was provided) (see Appendix A) to facilitate a follow-up session. The completed forms were given to the key informant, a member of the community.

1.8.5 Data generation

Data was collected through online individual semi-structured interviews and two online focus group discussions. WhatsApp was used as the data generation platform due to the restrictions placed on face-to-face data collection as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic (see section 3.7). This study acknowledges that data was generated in a collaborative process between the co-researchers and researcher using a community-based action research approach (see section 3.6.1.1).

1.8.5.1. Online Individual interviews: River of Life.

Once potential co-researchers had been identified, I scheduled online contact sessions with those individuals who had indicated an interest. Information packs with the consent forms, in both English and Afrikaans, as well as stationery and sanitiser, were delivered to the key informant to distribute to each co-researcher before their online individual interview. Prior to each online contact session, I discussed the consent forms with the potential co-researchers.

Semi-structured interviews are useful for gaining insight into complex phenomena as they enable an in-depth exploration of the experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of the co-researchers (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). They are also flexible, offering the researcher the scope to respond to interesting aspects that emerge, including those that have been suggested by the respondents themselves (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As such, the interview schedule functions as a guide and not as a directive. It was seen as an interactive process in which the interview was more than a mere information gathering session but was regarded as a 'co-constructed conversation' that was jointly created (Tracy, 2020, p. 160). The co-researchers were regarded as experts of their own lived realities (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

As part of the interview, co-researchers were asked to engage with a 'River of Life' activity in which they used words, drawings, and colour to reflect on significant events and turning points in their lives (Engage for Equity, 2020). People often express their experiences in the form of visual images. These visual representations thus held the prospect of revealing socially significant practices in non-verbal ways

(Leavy, 2017). Awareness of such events and how co-researchers navigated challenges in the past had the potential to inform them about approaches to addressing future challenges. It also created a platform in which the co-researchers could decide what and how they wished to share their experiences.

1.8.5.2. Focus group: Arts-based techniques and Photovoice.

The co-researchers were invited to two focus group sessions in which they focused on their experiences of navigating adolescent motherhood and how it had influenced their identity. A focus group usually consists of members who have certain characteristics which are relevant to the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Within community-based participatory action research (CBPAR), focus group co-researchers are viewed as key informants who play a pivotal role in unlocking experiences that could be regarded as rich data for the research study. However, I was mindful of the caution by Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2011) that when focus groups are used in participatory action research, care must be taken to ensure that it is not a researcher-directed group interview. They further suggested that it was designed as a collective and collaborative conversation in which the focus should be on the content, the interaction, and the development of democratic and participative relationships. This aligned with the research objectives of my study since it afforded me access to meaning-making processes as they occurred within a socially interactive space (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

During the first focus group discussion, co-researchers engaged in projective techniques, such as clay modelling and photo collage. Arts-based methods of data generation are thought to be useful in generating data about sensitive or complex topics where co-researchers might have trouble expressing themselves verbally (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Gameiro et al., 2018). Using projective techniques also allowed me to mediate research conversations in novel yet familiar ways. These projective techniques were thought to create distance between the narrators and their lived experiences, thus potentially minimising any vulnerability that individuals might have experienced in telling their stories (Daiute, 2010). Co-researchers were asked to create clay models as a way of introducing themselves to the group. I also participated in this activity as I believed it would enhance the democratic and participative research relationship. At the end of the session, in keeping with the cyclical and dynamic nature of action research, I demonstrated the use of collage and Photovoice to enable co-researchers to navigate their experiences and to interpret their present view of themselves. Co-researchers were trained in the use of Photovoice, and the ethical implications of visual data collection were discussed. Having an awareness of this ethical principle was vital within the proposed research study owing to the sensitive nature of the topic. Co-

researchers were free to choose either Photovoice or collage or to integrate elements of both in the telling of their story.

Photovoice is a CBPAR method involving the use of cameras. Co-researchers were presented with a topic and encouraged to photograph anything that they think might add significance to the exploration of that research topic (Harley, 2012). Co-researchers were requested to take or bring along photographs that represented a story that they would like to discuss around motherhood, identity, and resilience.

The visual data served as a stimulus for discussion. Co-researchers were able to provide feedback about their experiences regarding the meanings they attached to the photographs they had taken and the pictures they had collected. Co-researchers got a chance to voice their opinions and lived realities in a safe space. This interaction had the potential to generate rich data of the phenomenon under study (Bryman, 2006; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Using a focus group discussion created an opportunity to interact directly with the co-researchers and provided a space to observe how co-researchers related to one another. The experience of having others listen to one's story respectfully enables one to feel heard and has been found to be therapeutic. Storytelling thus enabled co-researchers to ascribe meaning to their experiences (Leavy, 2017).

1.8.5.3. Reflective journal.

As the primary researcher, it was important to engage in reflective practices throughout the research process. I, therefore, generated a reflective journal as an additional source of data to ensure that nuanced meaning-making experiences are not lost. Pasupathi (2001) argues that the way the listener responds influences what the storyteller remembers about his or her life narrative. Therefore, I had to reflect critically on my influence with the use of a reflective journal. This assisted me with an audit trail and ensured confirmability of the study. All decisions related to research as well as observations from the data generation process were also recorded in my reflective journal. Additionally, it was used to develop greater insight into the phenomenon under study (Meriam & Tisdell, 2016). I was, therefore, able to document valuable information during the entire research process which enabled me to contextualise information during the study. Excerpts from my reflective journal can be found in Chapters 3, 4 and 5. Further details of how particular data generation methods were used are discussed in Chapter 3.

1.8.6 Data analysis

In action research, data analysis is an ongoing, iterative process as the researcher and co-researchers reflect on and interpret the generated data in a cyclical manner that can influence what happens in the next cycle of the process. It is a continual process of seeking out new ways of seeing, exploring, and

describing (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). This non-linear process can lead to the generation of authentic data which is focused on actions that lead to change (Noffke & Somekh, 2013). Qualitative data for the study were collected in several ways, including online individual interviews, online focus group interviews, visual sources (clay models, 'River of Life' maps, Photovoice and collages) and a reflective journal throughout the research process. An inductive coding process was engaged to organise and summarise the data according to emerging categories or themes and in line with the research questions included in the interview schedules (Lapadat, 2010).

To conduct a full analysis of the data, the online individual interviews and online focus group discussions were video recorded and transcribed verbatim, as recommended by Merriam and Tisdell (2016). Thereafter, a thematic analysis was undertaken to identify themes and patterns. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), a thematic analysis can be considered a constructionist method in that 'it examines how events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within a society' (p. 10). Additionally, visual data analysis was also incorporated. An exploratory narrative analysis of the clay models, collages, photographs and transcripts was undertaken to gain an understanding of the co-researchers' experiences of motherhood and how this influences their identity and resilience. An ongoing collaborative analysis and interpretation took place (Babbie & Mouton, 2013). Additional information regarding data analysis can be found in Chapter 3.

1.9 Ensuring Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness encompasses the various approaches used to enhance the quality of a research study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). All research should be concerned with producing reliable and valid knowledge in an ethically sound manner. Therefore, credibility deals with the extent to which the research findings can be considered plausible (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The most effective way of ensuring credibility is by using different data sources. Triangulation, therefore, refers to the 'use of multiple sources of information to help minimise bias in the data and the research process' (Creswell, 2014, p. 185). The study used various sources of data collection to minimise the influence of the researcher's presence within the community.

Member-checking with co-researchers further ensured the accuracy of interpretations during data collection and analysis. During data collection, I made use of probing and summarising to give co-researchers a chance to clarify and verify their responses. Probes are questions or comments that researchers make following a co-researcher's responses. It was a helpful method to elicit more information from co-researchers (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Co-researchers were asked to validate the accuracy of my interpretations of the visual data as well as of their responses during the interviews. This

allowed the research findings to be conveyed richly and descriptively. Thus, a shared experience was created by allowing for transparency and ownership by the co-researchers.

An essential part of action research is that it 'ensures that the research actions taken, lead to finding solutions to the problem(s) that initiated the study' (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 67). In this study, the findings may help to inform practice within the larger society. It also ensured that co-researchers were given a voice and platform to talk about their experiences without the fear of judgement.

Additionally, owing to the collaborative nature of action research, researchers often participated with peers to ensure that 'methods, evidence, and findings resonate with a community of practice' (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 70). A peer examination group was used to discern the opinions of the key informant, co-researchers, and colleagues (Nieuwenhuis, 2010). Engaging in dialogue with a supervisor greatly enhanced the trustworthiness of this research study.

In qualitative research, the researcher is said to be the key instrument for data collection and data analysis (Merriam, 2002; Creswell, 2014). Therefore, I had to be cognisant of my own worldviews, sets of beliefs, and experiences before entering the research process. According to Banks et al. (2013), 'all participatory research involves some degree of collaboration' (p. 267). This places great emphasis on being mindful of power relationships. To counter-power dynamics, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) argue that research needed to be done *with* the co-researchers and not *on* the co-researchers.

Reflective practices on behalf of the researcher therefore greatly enhanced the trustworthiness of the study and encouraged the involvement of co-researchers. Retrospective reflections included acknowledging and sharing reactions, feelings, observations, and ideas regarding the process. Reflection happened through the medium of writing, speaking, listening, and drawing. The purpose of reflection included reviewing my own behaviours and learning patterns, as well as those of others to explore connections between knowledge and to review learning behaviours critically (Lew & Schmidt, 2011).

1.10 Ethical Considerations

I am cognisant of the fact that the study included people from a vulnerable population and engaged with a sensitive subject matter. For the study to be ethically sound, I had to place the highest regard on ensuring that co-researchers' dignity and welfare were maintained throughout (Babbie & Mouton, 2013). I concur with Allan (2008, p. 288) that '[a]ll research levies a cost on society and participants – even if they only contribute their time'. This cost was kept to a minimum. I understood that the narratives were sensitive and could have evoked an emotional reaction from co-researchers. Any co-researcher, who wished to do so, was allowed to attend counselling or to have access to a social worker should they have

chosen to. Throughout the research process, I remained mindful of the principle of non-maleficence, which purports to avoid harm to or any negative influence for the co-researchers involved.

All ethical concerns were discussed with both the research supervisor and co-researchers and were an ongoing process throughout the study. The discussions took place in a language that all relevant parties were able to understand. Owing to the sensitive nature of the study, it was important to remind the potential co-researchers that their participation in this study was completely voluntary, that they had the right to withdraw at any time, and that they were under no obligation to participate in any of the data collection methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Before participating in the study, I discussed the consent form with them to ensure that they were fully apprised of their rights. In this form, co-researchers were reminded about the focus and aims of the study as well as the potential risks and benefits of participation (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). They were then asked to indicate that they understood and had to sign the consent form. A copy of this form was made available to them. It contained the contact details of the therapist whom they were free to contact at no cost to themselves.

When engaging in community-based action research, respect for communities and community members had to be considered. The utmost effort was made to respect the values and interests of the community and co-researchers involved in the study. Wilson et al. (2018) advise that 'a reciprocal learning culture' be established to improve communication and understanding (p. 195). Owing to the nature of data collection, the confidentiality and anonymity of both co-researchers and community members during visual data collection was carefully monitored. 'Visual ethics training' that ensured the ethical use of visual methods of data collection was conducted with the co-researchers. In conclusion, harm can be minimised by treating all persons involved with respect and dignity, and taking extra precautions not to violate their privacy, autonomy, and confidentiality. Allan (2008) emphasises the importance of confidentiality and ensuring that co-researchers cannot be identified. Pseudonyms were used in the study, and I ensured that no identifying details were included. I further ensured the co-researchers that the collected data would solely be used for the purpose of the research study. Co-researchers were informed that they might, on written request, have access to the transcripts and the final copy of the research analysis and findings. Hardcopy data was stored in a locked cabinet and digital data was stored on a password-controlled USB drive, which was also kept in a locked cabinet. A more in-depth discussion of the key ethical issues related to this study is elaborated on in Chapter 3.

1.11 Chapter Division and Proposed Timeline

Chapter 1 introduced the research study by explaining the motivation and background for the study and provided an overview of the study. This chapter also included the research focus and provided a brief overview of the research paradigm, the research design and methodology that was used for the study.

Chapter 2 will provide an in-depth literature review of narrative identity formation and marginalised women's experiences of early motherhood. This chapter will further reflect on recent studies on identity, resilience, and early motherhood.

Chapter 3 will address the research paradigm, research approach, research design and methodology for the study. The mechanisms that will be used to ensure the reliability of the study will also be explored within this chapter. The ethical considerations, practices and dilemmas that are foreseen will be discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 4 will elaborate on the research findings. The findings will be presented by employing direct quotations, written text, and images. The lived experiences of co-researchers will receive a voice by means of emergent categories and themes. An analysis and interpretation of the data will be discussed.

Chapter 5 will offer a summary of the findings. Conclusions of the research study will also be given. A reflection of the strengths and limitations of the study will be noted. Finally, recommendations for future research will be given.

1.12 Summary

In Chapter 1, I introduced the research project. I looked at the challenge of early motherhood and the influence it may have on identity formation and life choices. This research aimed to gain insight into how motherhood in adolescence may have influenced the identity formation and life choices of a group of women in an economically marginalised community. It sought to contribute to the growing body of research around providing meaningful support to encourage self-efficacy among young women who, for various reasons, became parents during adolescence. The chapter also introduced my research design and methodology, discussed various ethical issues as they may pertain to the study and addressed the issue of quality assurance. I concluded the chapter with an overview of the areas that will be addressed in the various chapters.

The following chapter will present the literature review.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

'My swangerskap het vir my gevoel ek val in 'n donker gat'

(My pregnancy made me feel that I had fallen into a dark hole, FG: Shandre, p. 8, line 15).

2.1 Introduction

'Adolescent pregnancy and childbearing have been debated as a "crisis"' (Rock, cited in Govender et al., 2020, p. 2). The issue of early motherhood is usually fraught with a multitude of complexities that occur between the ages of 12 and 19 years of age. In South Africa, most pregnancies typically occur between 15 and 19 years. In 2020, 136,386 children were born to mothers in their adolescent years. In addition to 'the social circumstances, environment, and life experiences [which] also shape[s] the construction of [early] motherhood' (Govender et al., 2020, p. 2), the latest statistics related to the Covid-19 pandemic indicate a significant increase in the number of teenage pregnancies (Francke, 2021).

Having a child during the adolescent years has a major impact on various aspects of a young girl's own development (Tatlilioğlu, 2018). Adolescence is a turbulent time in any young person's life. Physical, emotional, and psychological changes occur and disrupt the once-calm equilibrium of our worlds. It is a phase of life when we discover who we are and form our identities. We explore, we experiment, and we decide. To understand the various phases of development, I will refer to Erikson's psychosocial developmental theory. This theory consists of various stages in which development occurs throughout one's lifespan. It emphasises how social experience and interaction play a role in human development. According to Erikson (1968), early life is a time of identity formation in which young people explore, select, and consolidate roles, goals, and values to present their life trajectory and associated goals. There is ample literature, and much research has been done on the topic of adolescence and the ripple effect that our decisions during this stage have on the rest of our lives; motherhood being one of them.

A review of the literature related to the transition to early motherhood as an adolescent was explored in this chapter. The bio-ecological systems theory forms the theoretical basis of understanding for this research study. In addition, Erikson's psychosocial theory and Marcia's identity statuses were considered as they related to adolescence as a developmental phase.

Early motherhood may have a complex effect on adolescent mothers, and in this study, I considered the factors pertaining to it. Thus, this review critically discussed the various challenges that adolescents, and particularly young mothers, might have experienced as it relates to their identity formation and how this may lead to a redemptive identity. In addition, this chapter explored the contributing factors and the

consequences of early motherhood, including both negative and positive aspects. To ensure that this is done effectively, a social justice-oriented community-based participatory action research (CBPAR) approach was used. I worked collaboratively with the women in this study to consider the complex way in which adolescent motherhood influenced the various aspects of their lived realities.

2.2 Bio-Ecological Systems Theory

To give justice to the lived realities of young girls, it is important to take a systemic view of the phenomenon of early motherhood. I have therefore included the bioecological systems theory as a theoretical framework from which I have conducted my research study.

The bio-ecological systems theory holds that we encounter different environments throughout our lifespan that may influence our behaviour in variable degrees. The theory analyses a person's development in the context of the relational system that constitutes their environment. Bronfenbrenner's theory defines complex systems within the environment, each of which has an impact on the person's development. The interaction between the physiological factors of an individual's maturity, the immediate family, community environment, and the social landscape promotes and guides the individual's development. Changes or conflicts in one system affects the other systems. Therefore, in this study, it was important not only to focus on the young mothers and their immediate environment, but also to consider the interaction of the wider systems in order to bring insight into the lived realities of young mothers (Yakubu & Salisu, 2018). These systems and their interactions, as described by the bio-ecological systems theory, is depicted in Figure 2.1.

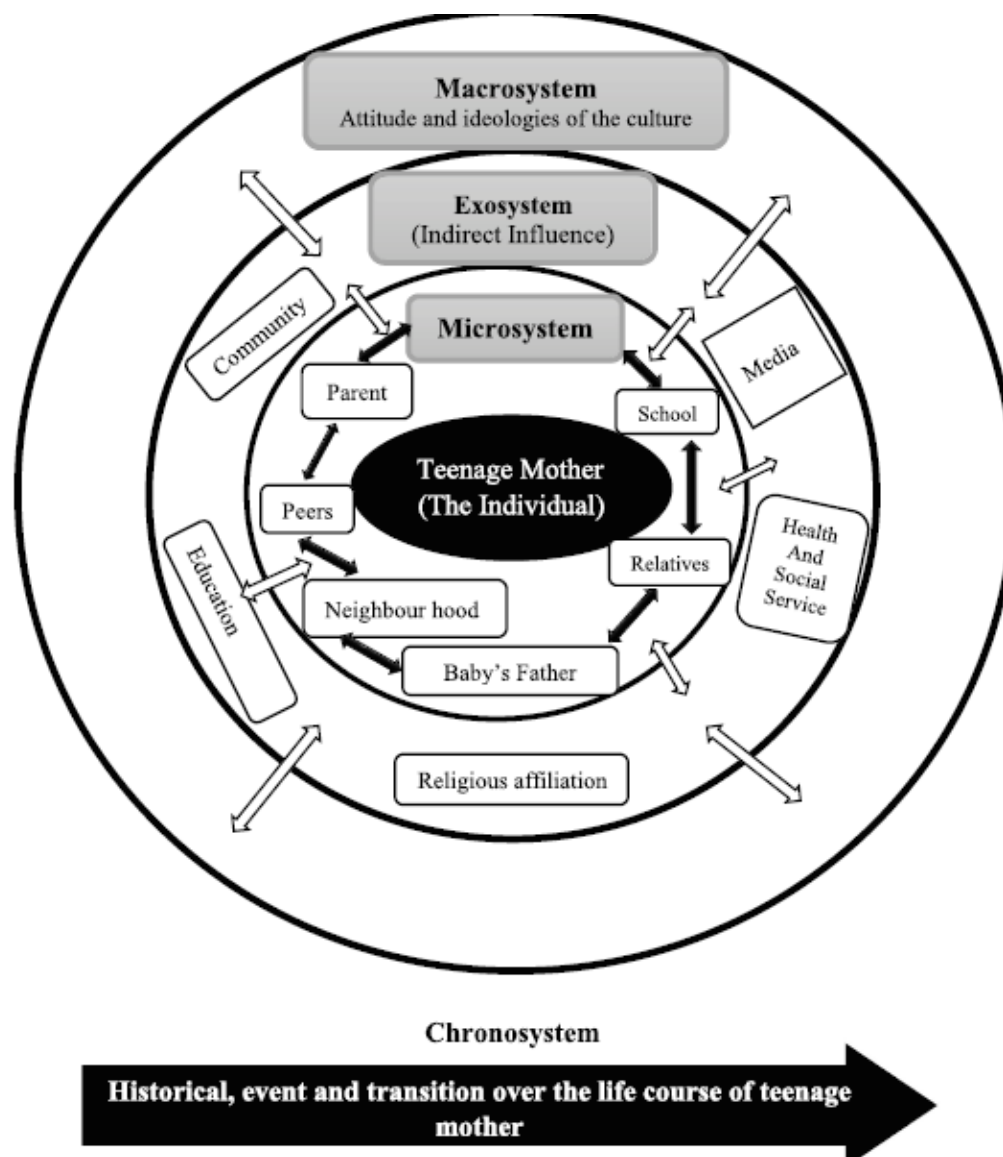


Figure 2.1. Bio-ecological Systems and Their Interactions (Source: Twintoh et al., 2021).

2.2.1 The person

The young mother is placed at the centre of her social context, including her lived experience with early motherhood. The bio-ecological theory acknowledges the role of an individual's personal characteristics in social interactions. According to Swart and Pettipher (2019), Bronfenbrenner has identified three personal characteristics that can significantly influence the proximal processes of the entire life cycle.

Demand characteristics such as age, gender, or appearance may influence initial interaction with other people, because of the expectations that they may form (Tudge et al., 2009). Taking the demand characteristics into account is essential when considering young mothers' meaning-making experiences. In contrast with the above, resource characteristics are not immediately apparent. They include mental and emotional resources, such as past experiences, intelligence, and skills; and material resources, such as housing, education, and responsive caregivers. These aspects play an integral role in the meaning-

making experiences and lived realities that young mothers face. Lastly, force characteristics are intrinsic dispositions and relate to changes in motivation, perseverance, and temperament. Bronfenbrenner pointed out that although individuals have the same resources, their developmental trajectories may differ based on characteristics such as motivation to succeed and perseverance in the face of difficulty. In this process, Bronfenbrenner established basic principles about how the environment may affect personal characteristics, and self-esteem seems to correlate strongly with early motherhood (Corcoran, 1999; Jonas et al., 2016). Young girls with higher levels of motivation and perseverance may be better equipped to determine which experiences influence their identity formation.

2.2.2 The microsystem

The microsystem includes the 'pattern of activities, roles, interpersonal relations and experiences by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics' (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 22). According to Twintoh, et al. (2021), microsystems are people's closest environments, including structures with which young women may have direct contact. There is what Bronfenbrenner calls a reciprocal effect between the interactions of individuals within the microsystem. He points out that such a relationship exists at all levels of the environment. In a microsystem, the two-way interactions are the strongest and have the greatest impact on the person, but interactions at the external levels can also have an impact on the internal structures (Tudge & Rosa, 2013). The microsystem consists of a person's closest environment, such as the home environment, school, friends, or a close relative. Other examples include neighbours, people from a religious environment, and the baby's father. The microsystem focuses on the support systems and the interactions that exist among them. The understanding of the microsystem guides this study in viewing the young mother as a person with unique characteristics who functions as part of different contexts within her environment. In this study, emphasis is placed on the interpersonal relations, experiences, and activities that the co-researchers found meaningful to their lived experiences of motherhood in the context of a marginalised community.

2.2.3 The mesosystem

The mesosystem includes the connections and processes that take place between two or more environments of which the young mother is a part. Mesosystems can therefore expand or contract as the individual interacts within the microsystem. These interactions may include interactions between the teenage mother and the local clinic, her peers, or her school environment. The interactions can either have a positive or negative experience on the young women's lived experience of motherhood. According to Jonas et al. (2016), social support and family functioning were major predictors of early motherhood. This study, therefore, focused on the young mother's lived experiences and how the interactions between the microsystems influenced their identity formation and resilience perceptions of the experiences that

have taken place in the mesosystem; experiences which they deem meaningful in terms of how they perceive their identity

2.2.4 The exosystem

The exosystem includes the connections and processes that take place between two or more environments in which the individual is not actively situated. The events that occur within other systems may have follow-on effects for the young mother, and reciprocal yet indirect interactions and influence is likely to occur (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1989). The exosystem does not directly influence the mother, but aspects such as clinic staffing issues and parental workplace difficulties may indirectly influence the young mother. It is useful to keep exosystems in mind as they are important influences on human growth and development. In this study, focus is placed on the perceptions and meanings the young women placed on their lived experiences, even the ones not directly within their system.

2.2.5 The macrosystem

The macrosystem entails the larger social and cultural context in which the other systems exist. According to Swart and Pettipher (2019), this would include the dominant attitudes, beliefs, and values within a society. The macrosystem further 'draws heavily on attitude, ideologies, culture and beliefs that have indirect effects on other systems and the individual.' (Twintoh et al., 2021, p. 2). Embedded in each system is a social mode of exchange. The macrosystem can be considered as a social model of a culture, subculture, or other broader social background. Equally important, the macrosystem also encompasses the political system within which the microsystems function and the laws governing them. Bronfenbrenner (2001) reiterates that the behaviours and concepts that characterise macrosystem models are passed from generation to generation through various cultural institutions, such as home, school, and community. For example, if a culture views parenting as the job of the parents, then naturally that culture will not provide ample guidance when adolescent parents are requiring support. This, in turn, has implications for the parents' educational environment and the likelihood that they will take on parenting tasks (Paquette & Ryan 2011.) Smith (2011) says that the effects of the macrosystem usually become apparent when comparing children and adolescents raised in different societies. Thus, when studying the lived experiences of adolescent mothers, it is important to take the macrosystem into account.

2.2.6 The chronosystem

The chronosystem is a description of the development or process of external systems in time, thus involving 'change or consistency over time' (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 40). It contains the temporal dimension in relation to the individual's environment. All the other systems are encompassed within the greater influence of time and how it relates to the interactions between the abovementioned systems

(Swart & Pettipher, 2019). These interactions must occur regularly and over extended periods of time. The elements of the system may be external, such as the timing of a parent's death, or internal, such as the physiological changes that occur as the mother grows older. As individuals grow up, they may react differently to environmental changes and be better able to assess how these changes will affect them. With age, they may also be better equipped to realise how these changes might influence them. Time is thus treated as an important aspect within the systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). It uses concepts such as change, development, history, time, and life course to show changes over time. These concepts may be expected or unexpected and might change the interaction between the person and their environment, for example, entering puberty or having one's first child at an early age. It is important to note that the young mother's developmental pathways do not rely solely on one aspect but are part of the proximal process between the person, the environmental systems, and the specific time at which they occur.

2.2.7 Proximal processes

According to Tudge et al. (2009), the proximal process is defined as the development that happens because of reciprocal interaction between the individual and others, objects, and symbols that are part of their immediate environment. The focus is on the reciprocal nature of the interaction. The key to understanding the proximal process and the general ecological process is that there is a two-way relationship between the individual and the environment and each influences the other (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The proximal process is not just a one-way effect of the environment on what the individual does. Proximal processes are not only interactions between two people in direct communication, but also interactions with objects and symbols that create the context. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) note that the proximal process is not an isolated event, but that it occurs repeatedly and can vary in complexity. The effective proximal process may be part of a sequence. Bronfenbrenner (1989) further considers group and individual activities as mechanisms through which individuals understand their world and form ideas about their place in it. Thus, emphasis is placed on the proximal processes within the study because regular interaction forms part of the women's lived experiences and meaning-making process with regards to early motherhood.

2.3 Understanding Factors Linked to Adolescent Pregnancy: A Review of the Literature

After gaining an understanding of the bio-ecological systems theory as the theoretical basis for this study, I will hereafter elaborate on research regarding early motherhood since adolescent pregnancies have long been a social and scientific issue for developed, developing, and underdeveloped nations and are a complex phenomenon in society. Furthermore, teenage pregnancy can be considered a major public health issue in South Africa (De Wet et al., 2018).

2.3.1 Prevalence of teenage pregnancy

The onset of reproductive behaviour varies widely across countries and among subgroups in the same country. General social norms and values, determined by social, economic, cultural, psychological, and developmental factors, influence adolescent behaviour. In more conservative societies, women's first sexual conduct often occurs within marriage, while in more liberal societies there is tolerance for extramarital sex (World Bank, 2013).

It is estimated that around 21 million girls become pregnant in developing regions every year. Of these young women, more than 770 000 births occur to adolescent girls in developing countries before the age of 15 (Darroch et al., 2016). Some studies indicated that adolescent fertility rates have declined, but in fact, the number of births to adolescents have not. According to *Every Woman Every Child* (2015), the greatest number of adolescent births occur in West Africa.

There is growing evidence that adolescents are influenced by their environment and therefore community characteristics influence reproductive behaviour. Hence, early motherhood is more likely to occur in marginalised communities (UNICEF, 2013). According to Pelz et al. (2021), a marginalised community is usually in a rural poor and geographically remote area, rife with economic inequality and lack of basic services. Bou Nassar et al. (2021) add that marginalised community members are usually considered less literate and comparatively powerless. In Ukomelela, like many other township areas in South Africa, there is a lack of education, alcoholism, high unemployment rates, housing and sanitation issues, single-parent households and a lack of parental involvement. According to the Community Empowerment project, owing to the lack of parental involvement and supervision teenagers are often ill-equipped to deal with all the difficulties faced within the community system. In some marginalised communities, girls are under pressure to marry and to have a child prematurely. In the least developed countries, particularly in Africa, at least 39 per cent of girls marry before the age of 18 (Kozuki et al., 2013; World Bank, 2017). Interestingly, not all teenage pregnancies are unplanned. Just as, in a study conducted by Wahn et al. (2015), more recent research suggests that early motherhood might still be planned. Various reasons for this phenomenon occur, such as finding a purpose, being accepted with their community or escaping daily conditions. The co-researchers further revealed that the pregnancy was either due to a specific pattern among relatives, seeking new opportunities, or seeking success in life as a mother. Additionally, it was found that many teenage mothers become pregnant because they feel a sense of loneliness and need a person to love (Wahn et al., 2005). In this case, teenagers are taking on the responsibilities and hardships of being a teenage parent (Jonas et al., 2016).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, these hardships have increased dramatically. It was reported that early motherhood increased significantly during the pandemic with more than 36 000 babies being delivered to mothers between the ages of 10 and 19 years of age in the first quarter of 2021, which is considered more than 30 per cent of the annual average (O'Regan, 2021). Granville Whittle, deputy director-general of the Department of Basic Education, indicates that the high rates are largely due to learners not being able to attend school which, for many of them, offers a safe space. According to Whittle, the Northern Cape currently has the highest proportion of teenage pregnancy in South Africa, with almost 20 per cent of girls between the ages of 10 and 19 giving birth between April 2020 and March 2021 (Gatticchi, 2021).

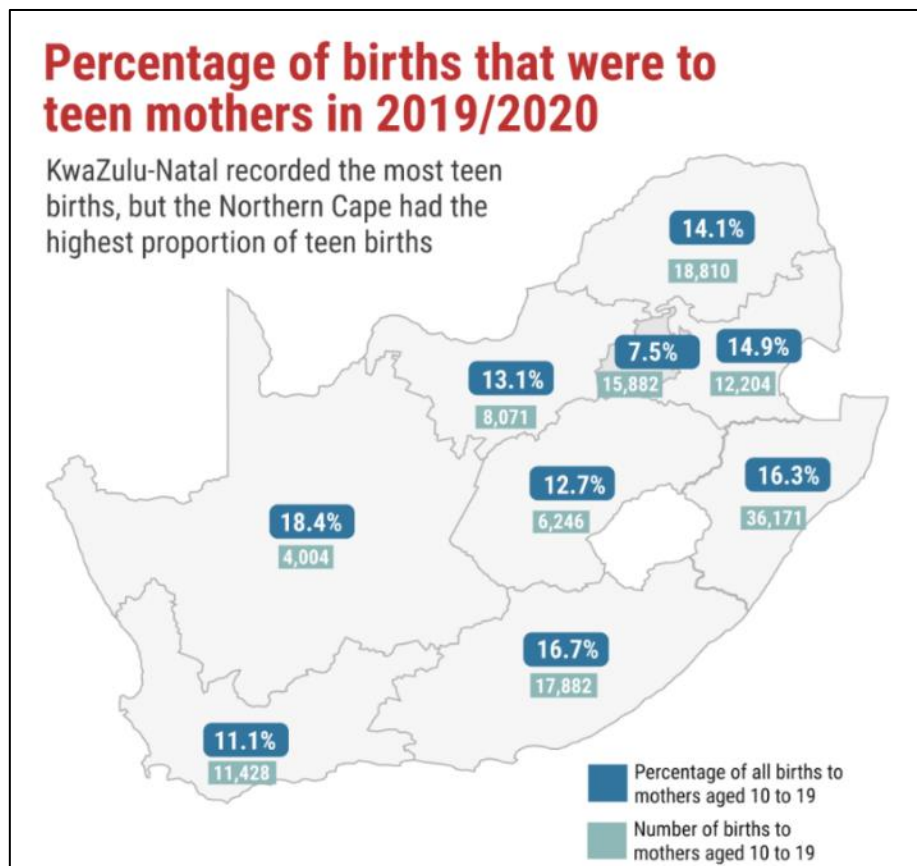


Figure 2.2. Percentage of Births to Teenage Mothers in 2019/2020 (Source: Gatticchi, 2021)

2.3.2 Reactions to pregnancy

Disclosing information about an unplanned pregnancy during your teenage years can cause feelings of shame and guilt. These feelings can escalate to signs of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation if the reactions by caregivers and peers are not favourable (Govender et al., 2020). According to Chiazor (2017), and Masuku et al. (2021), pregnancy remains, at least for most, an unacceptable notion at a young age and is often accompanied by initial rejection and abandonment by caregivers. Caregivers' reactions can lead to extreme considerations such as abortion. Every year, approximately 5.6 million abortions take place amongst adolescent girls and, of those, almost 4 million are unsafe causing lasting

health issues for the young mothers (Darroch et al., 2016). Van Dyk (2019) found that fewer than 5 per cent of health facilities in South Africa offered safe abortions to women.

In addition to the reactions of others to their pregnancy, the women themselves also undergo physical and emotional changes. Xavier et al. (2018) found that adolescent girls are more likely to suffer from long-term mental health difficulties. Pregnancy during the adolescent years is further associated with higher rates of suicide (Chan et al., 2016; Govender et al., 2020). Participants in a study conducted by Masuku et al. (2021) reported that accepting these changes was problematic as they 'gained weight, had swollen feet, experienced sensitivity of nipples' and, in general, felt uncomfortable with their bodies changing. Physical and emotional changes affected the young women's self-worth and self-esteem (Masuku et al., 2021). It is common knowledge that these, often uncomfortable, physical changes prepare a woman's body for the delivery of a baby. According to Soma-Pillay et al. (2016), further physical changes include increased body fat, blood volume and cardiac output.

2.3.3 Factors which contribute to adolescent pregnancy and an exploration of the consequences of early motherhood

In my exploration of the literature pertaining to the factors and consequences of early motherhood, I discovered that the 'contributing factors for teenage pregnancy can be related to the individual herself, social, structural or environmental factors and the interaction between the individual and her social/structural/environmental situation'. (Flanagan et al., 2013, p. 10). Economic, social and community factors have a major impact on early motherhood (Jonas et al., 2016). These include, but are not limited to poverty, lack of support, and peer pressure (Govender et al., 2020; Masuku et al., 2021). I will, however, also make mention of positive factors, such as support and religion, by including resilience theory and how adversity can lead to transformational growth.

2.3.3.1 Factors commonly associated with early motherhood.

The factors that make adolescent girls more likely to become pregnant have been extensively researched over the years (Furstenberg et al., 1987; Dryfoos, 1990; Maemeko et al., 2018). Researchers have discovered numerous personal, familial, and social factors that are more commonly associated with early motherhood. Pregnancy in adolescence can be associated with problematic behaviours, such as alcohol and drug use and premature onset of sexual activity. These behaviours are often related to social disadvantage, poverty, homelessness, unemployment, poor housing, fragmented family structures and stressful life events (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1998; Jonas et al., 2016). Pregnant adolescents are often found in societies where poverty, low educational attainment, and fewer employment opportunities prevail, and families are headed by mothers who gave birth to their first child in adolescence (Dryfoos,

1990; Stoner et al., 2019). Early motherhood is a further risk factor for disruption of education, future unemployment, sexually transmitted infections, HIV, preterm birth and poor mental health (Kanku & Mash, 2010; Jonas et al., 2016; Masuku et al., 2021).

According to Neal et al. (2012), complications during early pregnancy and adolescent childbirth are the global leading cause of death for girls between the ages of 15 and 19 years of age. Women who have their first child during their teenage years are at a higher risk of various health issues such as eclampsia, puerperal endometritis, and systemic infections. Furthermore, children born to adolescent mothers are at risk for low birth weight, preterm delivery, and severe neonatal conditions (Gurung et al., 2020; WHO, 2020; Masuku et al., 2021).

2.3.3.1.1 Financial constraints.

The literature revealed that the high number of teenage pregnancies has become a major social and educational problem, as this appears to be associated with poverty and low education levels (Furstenberg et al., 1987; Jonas et al., 2016; Govender et al., 2020; Twintoh et al., 2021;). Flanagan et al. (2013) describe poverty as a major structural factor leading to teenage pregnancy. A qualitative study conducted by Nkwanyana (2011) shows that early motherhood is more common among young people who grew up in poor families with lower educational or labour market expectations. This was also found in previous literature, as Mollborn and Morningstar (2009) indicate that teenage girls from poor socio-economic backgrounds, who are experiencing distress are more likely to become pregnant as teenagers. The consequences of poverty and economic inequality for young women around the world include lack of access to contraception, unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections, and increased risk of infant and maternal death (Russell & Shaw, 2009; Yakubu, & Salisu, 2018). Mothiba and Maputle's (2012) study further highlights that some teenagers who fall pregnant are commonly from impoverished social backgrounds, have minimal hope and expectation of improvement of their current social-economic situation, and hope that pregnancy will revive and establish self-identity and self-esteem lost owing to poverty. Education is important for girls as it could halt the poverty trap in which most girls from poverty-stricken families in developing countries find themselves (Morake, 2011).

Research evidence suggests that the majority of teenage pregnancies in South Africa are unplanned and non-consensual, and that only a third of teenagers are able to go back to school after the delivery of the baby (WHO, 2004; Jewkes et al., 2009; Willan, 2013; Govender et al., 2020). Morake's (2011) study in Limpopo province found that 20.2 per cent of learners were involved in intergenerational relationships as one means of financial support from older partners. Literature further estimates that among teenagers

who delivered babies only a third are able to postpone the birth of the next child and obtain their desired qualifications (Panday et al., 2009; Willan, 2013; Govender et al., 2020). Thus, it is evident that financial constraints have a negative impact on the number of adolescent girls who become pregnant, and these factors are likely to surface within this study.

2.3.3.1.2 Negative peer groups and community violence.

Adolescents often imitate the behaviour of their peers, parents, and society, whether positive or negative. An exploration of the literature indicated that one of the strongest psychosocial influences on adolescent sexual behaviours is peer perception of these behaviours (Pettifor et al., 2004; Fedorowicz et al., 2014; Govender et al., 2020).

Adolescence is a time of rapid physical, psychological, and social change. These multiple changes have promoted the emergence of new health risk behaviours such as physical inactivity, smoking, drinking, illicit drug use, and dangerous sexual activities. Substance abuse and the influence of alcohol use among adolescent girls has long been considered one of the major health and social problems leading to early motherhood (Mchunu et al., 2012; Yakubu, & Salisu, 2018; Govender et al., 2020). According to Born et al. (2015), contributing factors to risky sexual behaviour include peer pressure, alcohol and drug use, low self-esteem, and pressure from partners to engage in sexual relations. Accordingly, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2017) suggests that healthcare professionals, such as clinic staff, community members and parents should engage in collaborative discussions with teenagers around contraceptive use and navigating these discussions with their partners. Additionally, literature found that unprotected sex and other consequences are associated with adolescent alcohol use (Seggie, 2012). A Youth Risk Behaviour Survey was conducted with Grade 8 to 10 learners in the Western Cape Province and found that 36 per cent of students reported having had sex; 54 per cent had their first sexual experience before the age of 15 years; 59 per cent engaged in sex without a condom; 25 per cent had sex after drinking alcohol or after drug use (Morojele, et al., 2013).

Furthermore, research indicates that community violence and violence within the home are contributing factors to the high number of teenage pregnancy rates in South Africa (Jonas, 2021). Gender-based violence and childhood sexual abuse are prevalent in South Africa and contribute to the rise in teenage pregnancy since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, since many learners were not attending school during this time (Jewkes et al., 2020; Jonas, 2021; O'Regan, 2021). Gatticchi (2021) further explains that intermittent school closure led to an increased risk of sexual violence for young girls. Thus, it is clear throughout the literature that peer pressure and violence in the home and the greater community have detrimental effects on teenage pregnancy.

2.3.3.1.3 Lack of sexual education and knowledge regarding contraceptive use.

Literature has indicated that a lack of education pertaining to sexual health, especially contraceptive use, can be seen as a contributing factor to the increase in teenage pregnancies (Masuku et al., 2021). Owing to a lack of knowledge, stigmatisation, and misunderstandings about where to get contraceptives and how to use them, adolescent girls who want to avoid pregnancy may not be able to do so (Kangaude et al., 2020). Adolescents face barriers to accessing contraceptives, including restrictive laws and policies based on age or marital status, health worker prejudice, reluctance to recognise adolescents' sexual health needs, and adolescents' inability to obtain contraceptives owing to knowledge, transportation, and financial restrictions (Sawyer et al., 2018). A study conducted by Jonas (2021) indicates that young women find it difficult to access contraceptives and lack information regarding contraceptive use. Furthermore, only 28 per cent of respondents indicated using contraceptives regularly as a range of stigmas surround contraceptive use. These include the effects it has on their bodies, the effectiveness of contraceptives, and the unprofessional manner in which health staff talk to adolescents seeking information (Yakubu, & Salisu, 2018; Govender et al., 2020). In addition, adolescents may lack the initiative or autonomy to ensure correct and consistent use of contraceptive methods. Van Dyk (2019) reports on contraceptive shortages when a government tender did not work out, exacerbating the situation. This led to greater risks of unwanted pregnancies during the lockdown period in South Africa.

Additionally, literature explored issues within the family unit and emotional immaturity as possible exposures to sexual risk or increase in the desire for unprotected sex (Koniak-Griffin et al., 2002; Kirby et al., 2007; Yakubu, & Salisu, 2018). A study by Shrestha et al. (2015) found that although adolescents were aware of the risk of unprotected sex, they continued to be sexually active. Similarly, Mchunu et al. (2012) conducted a quantitative study on pregnancies and associated factors among South African adolescents and point out that adolescents seem not to consider the risks associated with unprotected sex. During a study on factors affecting adolescent pregnancies, a high percentage of respondents indicated that they were aware of the consequences of unprotected sex but continued to engage in dangerous sexual relationships (Mushwana et al., 2015). Similarly, in a quantitative study in South Africa aimed at investigating high school girls' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours regarding emergency contraception, early motherhood and sexual behaviour in high school confirmed that peer pressure and stigmatisation are the major factors influencing early motherhood (Ramathuba, 2013; Govender et al., 2020). In addition, although organisations provide comprehensive reproductive health services, these services continue to be stigmatised within society, which makes accessing these essential services difficult for young women (Mohammadi et al., 2016; Yakubu & Salisu, 2018; Kangaude et al., 2020). A recent study indicates the lack of empathy that clinic staff have towards adolescent mothers. The study made mention of maltreatment and excessive judgement, as one of the participants proclaimed, 'I want

their help and not their judgement' (Govender et al., 2020, p. 12). Furthermore, the treatment by clinic staff led to adolescent girls not attaining sufficient information on 'postnatal depression, child development, nutrition, the use, and effects of traditional medication to treat childhood illnesses' (Govender et al., 2020, p. 14). A study by Nkosi and Pretorius (2019) additionally reveals that stigmatisation within the school environment and larger society led to limited support from families owing to this stigmatisation.

Research further points to the lack of educational attainment as another crucial factor leading to and as a consequence of teenage pregnancy. According to Malahlela and Chireshe (2017) educators who participated in their study, were of the view that early motherhood may have a negative effect on learners within South African high schools. The study found a detrimental effect on school attendance and scholastic performance. In addition, the Department of Education has stressed the importance of schools paying particular attention to the learners' overall well-being. The shift in school-based interventions has also developed policies in which schools are expected to emphasise abstinence and safe sex to prevent sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancies (Department of Health, 2010). Furthermore, there are many different policies addressing teenage pregnancy within a school environment. The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 forbade the discrimination against girls on the basis of pregnancy and made it unlawful for a school to turn away a girl child who is pregnant. Similarly, Article 9(3) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996 states that no child may, directly or indirectly, be unfairly discriminated against on the basis of pregnancy. Furthermore, the Constitution states that every child has the right to education. Unfortunately, a study by Ramulumo and Pitsoe (2013), found few policies, including the Schools Act, which address the practical aspects related to accommodating pregnant girls and young mothers within a school environment. Subsequently, the literature indicates that although policies and educational opportunities at schools do exist, stigmatisation and peer influence at schools often lead to detrimental decision-making by teenage girls (Govender et al., 2020). Furthermore, schools are encouraged to establish healthy working relationships with parents and caregivers of learners to ensure a collaborative effort to reach academic success.

2.3.3.1.4 Lack of parental support and involvement.

It is clear from previous research that teenage mothers need more social support, especially from their parents (Kirchengast, 2016; Chung & Lee, 2018; Govender et al., 2020). With regard to support, the literature states that social support appears to stem from the interplay between young mothers and their social networks (Wahn et al., 2005; Masuku et al., 2021). In several cases, it is the lack of social support that affects young mothers' self-esteem (Millán-Franco et al., 2019; Govender et al., 2020).

According to Ntsepe et al. (2014), cultural beliefs prescribe behaviour and can be seen as symbols of interaction in a community. Beliefs are considered to be the norms and values shared by the community. In a qualitative study on socio-cultural influence on adolescents' decision-making in Khayelitsha, it was found that adolescent females were not supposed to talk about their number of sexual partners nor their use of condoms. The participants in the study also noted that traditions in some ways grant privileges to men and place women under male control. This can lead to women not being able to negotiate safer sex, such as condom use, which puts them at risk of pregnancy (Callands et al., 2013).

Mothiba and Maputle (2012) conducted a study in South Africa and found that some parents were reluctant to educate adolescents on sex education and contraception because they feared that adolescents might interpret this as permission to engage in sexual activities. In a study by Ntsoane et al. (2015), 78 per cent of high school learners indicated the inability to talk freely about sex-related topics with their parents. The study by Phetla et al. (2008) in the Burgersfort, Sekhukhune district of Limpopo Province further suggests that parent-child communication about sex is important to bring about the desired behavioural change that could reduce teenage pregnancy and ultimately prevent HIV infection in communities. The study, however, indicates that parents, especially in rural settings, frequently do not have adequate knowledge and skills to fulfil the role of educating their children about sex-related issues. According to Ntsoane et al. (2015), parents were identified as being a major source of information on issues related to sex including teenage pregnancy. Unfortunately, the communication and discussion about sex and teenage pregnancy did not translate into enabling learners to delay first sex or to abstain until marriage. A recent study by Dudek et al. (2021) indicates that if parents are not going to be the primary source of information regarding sex, youth will explore and seek sexual information through 'producing, consuming and discussing sexual content and activities with other young people' (p. 1). A study conducted in 2015 shows that family members' values and beliefs related to sexual exploits influence adolescents' attitudes and behaviours towards sex (Oyefara, 2005; Wamoyi et al., 2015). A report prepared by policy analysts highlights that open communication between parents and adolescents regarding sex, helps to delay the onset of sexual activity (Kim, 2008). A quantitative study conducted in Washington examined parental involvement in adolescents' first sexual experiences. The results showed that adolescents with higher levels of parental involvement and communication were less likely to engage in premature sexual intercourse. On the other hand, adolescents with lower levels of parental guidance were more likely to have sex early on in life (Ashcraft & Murray, 2017).

In contrast to the above literature, research by Mothiba and Maputle (2012) shows that many adolescents believe that talking about sex with their parents is a cultural taboo. Although many participants believed that the topic of sex is taboo, talking to their parents is of immense importance in influencing adolescents' sexual behaviour that may lead to unwanted pregnancy. Qualitative studies have shown that increased

sexual communication between parents and children can prevent negative peer pressure to engage in dangerous sexual behaviours (Teitelman et al., 2008; Mabunda & Madiba, 2017).

2.3.3.1.5 Lack of hope for the future.

Becoming a mother at a young age can have detrimental effects on a girl child. Whether the pregnancy was planned or unplanned, literature suggests despondent outcomes and a lack of hope for the future. Research indicates that girls may choose to become pregnant because of their limited educational and employment prospects (Sedgh et al., 2015). In marginalised communities and certain cultures, motherhood is valued, and marriage or union and childbirth may be the best of the limited options available. Literature further found that young mothers have higher levels of psychological distress than their adolescent peers without children Ozier (2011). Soares et al. (2021) found that suicidal behaviour, suicide, or attempted suicide are common amongst pregnant girls. The prevalence of suicidal behaviour was 13.3 per cent, and 1.3 per cent of young women in the study reported that they had attempted suicide in the past month. There have been significant associations between suicidal behaviour and low education, previous miscarriage, previous severe depression (Chan et al., 2016; Xavier et al., 2018; Masuku et al., 2021). The prevalence of these behaviours in pregnant adolescents with high social support is significantly lower than that of pregnant women with low social support.

It is therefore clear from the literature that being a new mother and having the added responsibility of taking care of a small child, often alone, can have detrimental effects on young women's mental health and identity formation. However, studies have shown teenage mothers' resilience, autonomy, and growth through this process. Many women ascribe positive meaning to their experience (Shea et al., 2015; Lévesque & Chamberland, 2016; Singh & Naicker, 2019).

2.3.3.1.6 Gender imbalances.

During the literature review, it was apparent that stigma, gender inequality, and gender-based violence compound the difficulties faced by pregnant adolescents and have a direct link to an increase in unwanted pregnancies (Ajayi & Ezegbe, 2020). A study by Christofides et al. (2014) indicates that gender power and socioeconomic status negatively impacted teenage pregnancy. They found that adolescent girls who have been victims of physical violence are more likely to have an unwanted pregnancy. Sexual violence led to unwanted pregnancies through partners discouraging contraceptive use, and underreported sexual violations, especially when committed by family members (Ajayi & Ezegbe, 2020).

Furthermore, having a child during adolescence was also a way to secure a better and more hopeful future (Christofides et al., 2014). In their study regarding transactional sex, Wamoyi et al. (2011) found

that young women use sex as a means to gain a measure of financial freedom and often sought older partners who have more economic means. Participants further indicated that they had little agency in deciding on contraception, such as condoms, as this was often the man's decision. Additionally, gender imbalance also occurs in the way love is portrayed. Literature states that young women's love aspirations are tied to the man's ability to provide financially, whereas, for young men, love was associated with finding a partner who is still a virgin (Bhana & Pattman, 2011). A study by Hanson et al. (2014) indicates that gender imbalances exist in a large part owing to adolescent upbringing. Thus, parental assumptions regarding gender roles affect adolescents' perceptions of sex. The data revealed that having to raise younger siblings often gave girls a first-hand experience of motherhood. Furthermore, girls were often raised more strictly, and they were expected to remain sexually pure. In contrast, their male counterparts were deemed as more masculine for having sexual prowess. These notions were also indicated by adolescent peer groups in naming females, 'sluts', and males, 'players'. These labels thus exacerbate behavioural double standards among the sexes and instil poor sexual negotiation dynamics regarding contraceptive use.

2.4 Positive Psychology and Resilience Theory

When conducting a literature review about early motherhood, most sources focus on the negative aspects. To focus on the lived realities and narratives of the co-researchers, it was imperative also to include the contradictory literature which highlights the positive aspects of the phenomenon, including the support, religious awareness, and transformational growth that the women may experience. Therefore, I decided to include positive psychology as part of the literature review and way of understanding early motherhood as a phenomenon.

In the 1930s, positive psychology emerged from the humanistic movement with the primary focus on moving away from psychopathology toward the enhancement of 'normal and optimal human growth', which is a fundamental principle of modern positive psychology (Bar-on, 2010, p. 55). Buhler (1979, as cited in Bar-On, 2010) considers positive psychology 'a near revolutionary step to create confidence in the concepts of healthy growth and constructive potentials of human nature' (p. 55). One of the first studies to investigate the notion of healthy growth, was that of Maslow (1950). His hierarchy of needs and ultimately, of reaching self-actualisation, incorporates concepts such as self-acceptance, reliability, independence, social responsibility, the intent to solve rather than to avoid problems, spontaneity, creativity, and a tendency to behave realistically. Building on Maslow's theory, Jahoda (cited in Bar-On, 2010), emphasised concepts related to modern-day positive mental health, such as 'self-acceptance, self-determination, self-actualisation, flexibility, satisfying interpersonal relationships, stress tolerance, effective reality testing and acceptance of reality, efficient functioning and adaptation, problem-solving,

and achievement in significant areas of life' (Bar-On, 2010, p. 56). Maslow and Jahoda can be considered the two most influential theorists of contemporary positive psychology.

Positive psychology as we know it today is thus the study of the advantages that enable individuals and communities to flourish by identifying the 'strengths and skills that enable individuals and communities to thrive' (Ciarrochi et al., 2016, p. 1). The field is based on the belief that people want to live full and meaningful lives, cultivate their inner best, and enhance their lived experiences. In the study, I consider it imperative to include meaningful contributions of resilience and positive outcomes from something that had the potential to change the trajectory of a young woman's life. Literature states that self-regard and self-acceptance, based on self-awareness (which is the ability to understand one's own feelings), interpersonal interactions, optimism and hope are some of the most prevalent concepts in the positive psychology movement (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Gable & Haidt, 2005; Seligman et al., 2005; Positive Psychology Center, 2021). To this, I want to add self-understanding, which I define as one's ability to make sense of one's own feelings and choices. In the current study, self-understanding will form the foundation of reflective practice. The abovementioned concepts impact health, well-being, the ability to find meaning and purpose in life, and happiness. Therefore, for the women in Ukomelela, the focus will not only be on making meaning from their lived experiences as young mothers, but how they used these experiences to cultivate hope and resilience. Thus, the co-researchers will not be viewed from the perspective of 'brokenness', but rather from a position of strength.

Adversity and challenging times are part of every person's lived experience, and this necessitates 'the scientific understanding and applications of resilience and transformational growth research' (Ivtzan et al., 2016, p. 75). Adversity can occur across one's lifespan. During the childhood years, poverty or abuse can occur; adolescence may include heartbreak and bullying; and adulthood may include loss or illness, to mention but a few. In this study, we primarily focused on early motherhood as one of those diversities, but it is more than likely that the women's stories are filled with various hardships throughout their development. Literature, however, suggests that we as humans have the 'possibility of learning from our struggles' as well as the potential to grow, heal, gain insight and transform (Ivtzan et al., 2016, p. 76).

Literature on resilience reveals that its origin stems from a developmental psychology perspective and that a specific definition is quite problematic. Some studies define resilience as the ability to recover from negative and life-altering experiences and thus being able to utilise coping mechanisms and support structures to make decisions that will overcome any possible harm (Gyan et al., 2017; Harms et al., 2018). Furthermore, Van Breda (2018) distinguishes between outcome resilience and process resilience. Outcome resilience can be defined as 'a stable trajectory of healthy functioning after a highly adverse event' (Bonanno, as cited in Southwick et al., 2014, p. 1). Thus, with this definition in mind, the study

looked at how early motherhood, as a highly adverse event, might have created a state of resilience in the face of adversity. Additionally, the process definition of resilience includes the ‘process of adjusting well to significant adversity’ (Theron, 2016, p. 636). In this study, resilience centred on the processes that enabled positive outcomes despite facing adversity in the form of teenage pregnancy. I concur with literature that the two definitions should integrate into a common experience of resilience (Van Breda, 2018). Conceptually, then, ‘resilience is a process that leads to an outcome, and the central focus of resilience research is on the mediating processes’ (Van Breda, 2018, p. 4). Taking this definition into consideration, resilience theory incorporates three interconnected components, as displayed in Figure 2.3.

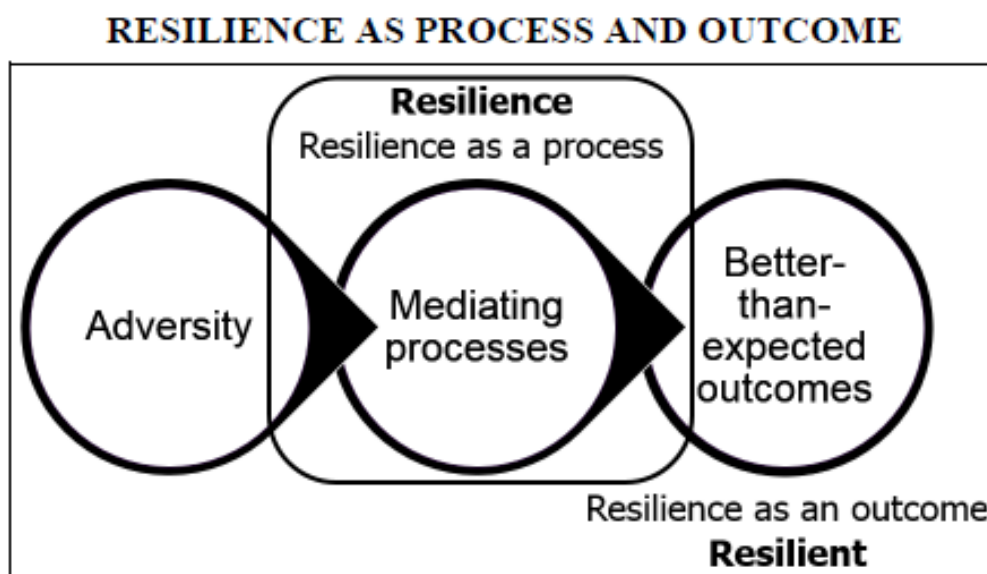


Figure 2.3. Resilience as Process and Outcome (Source: Van Breda, 2018)

Figure 2.3 illustrates that adversity is a requirement for resilience to manifest. Literature suggests that the term ‘resilience’ should be used as a process definition. Therefore, the ‘resilience’ of the co-researchers in this study is supportive behaviour towards other young mothers and hope for the future. In addition, ‘resilient’ will form part of the outcome definition. Thus, the women in the study can be seen as ‘resilient’ owing to the better-than-expected outcomes of their reality of early motherhood.

2.4.1 Support

As part of resilience, literature focuses on the impact that support has on the teenage mother. Chung et al., (2018) indicate that open and honest communication with parents, interactive school activities, support from the community, and applicable laws and policies serve as protective factors against early motherhood.

Literature further indicates that the arrival of a new baby can have positive effects on the connection between family members. As many young girls reside with their parents or legal guardians after the baby is born, the family unit explores the possibility of bringing new a new member home. With this, some families may become more united as they provide and care collaboratively for the newborn, which proves to strengthen family connections and their overall happiness (Pörtner et al., 2011). Additionally, a study conducted by Christofides, et al. (2014) indicates that, for some families, teenage pregnancy is seen as a rite of passage to womanhood and thus they embrace the phenomenon.

Moreover, no matter how mature a young girl may be before becoming a mother, having a baby means taking on more responsibilities. Many young mothers are eager to raise their children in better circumstances than they were brought up in. With the help of support networks, this motivation can have a positive impact on young women (Ranchhod et al., 2011; Pradhan et al., 2015; Govender et al., 2020).

2.4.2 The role of religion

Religious and spiritual awareness forms part of a positive psychology outlook on adversity. A study by Bosire et al. (2021) indicates that religion can cause adolescents to feel shame and guilt as topics related to sex are rarely discussed in religious contexts. However, they found that religion was still indicated as being important in helping adolescents to navigate early motherhood and even in preventing early pregnancies from occurring. Literature suggests that religious awareness was considered a 'source of strength and support' that guides adolescent mothers in maintaining a positive outlook despite negative contexts (Martins & Gall, 2021, p. 221). A study by Vitorino et al. (2018) found that religion was seen as a protective factor lowering depressive symptoms in women with high-risk pregnancies. According to Chung et al. (2018), being involved in religious activities and attending worship services on a regular basis can be seen as a protective factor in adolescent pregnancy. This may be due to the element of having a support network (Somefun, 2019). Thus, religion plays a significant role in assisting pregnant women to cope with their struggles and adversities and may even help prevent early pregnancies.

2.4.3 Transformational growth

Transformational growth focuses on how the young mothers report positive change and growth as a result of confronting and reflecting on the adversities that occurred throughout their lived experiences. Transformational growth is thus the process of making meaning from what they have gone through and how this culminates in a stronger sense of being. Furthermore, it can be described as a profound, fundamental change, altering the very nature of how one perceives difficulties in life through the retelling of one's story and through reimagining hope and purpose (Ivtzan et al., 2016). A recent meta-analysis suggests that growth does occur following negative experiences and adversity (Mangelsdorf et al., 2019). It was, however, found that growth may occur in some, but not in necessarily all psychosocial dimensions,

such as in social interactions and self-esteem. Transformational growth is a profound part of culminating purpose after an adverse event, such as early motherhood.

2.5 Identity Formation

Identity development is a psychosocial task with life-long relevance that has critical implications for health and well-being. Throughout life, we develop and grow, reaching new developmental stages. According to Poole and Snarey (2011), there are three primary processes that underlie identity formation and development, namely cognitive developmental processes, physical developmental processes, and an active sociocultural environment. Therefore, adolescence is a time of development as young people start to contemplate their answers intensely to the question of 'Who am I?'. Developmental changes in the adolescent brain further enable the young person to gain a sense of self. In the following section, two important theories will be discussed regarding identity development.

2.5.1 Erikson's eight progressive stages of human development and identity formation

Erik Erikson postulated eight progressive stages of human development and identity formation, which are influenced by biological, psychological, and social factors and that occur throughout the lifespan. These progressive stages come into consideration as individuals develop. Each stage is defined by two opposing psychological tendencies, one being more positive than the other. According to Orenstein and Lewis (2020), each individual must navigate the opposing sides in order to find a suitable balance between the two. Each life stage consists of different tendencies that need to be navigated in order to establish a balance. Below is an outline of the stages:

2.5.1.1 Childhood stages.

- **Stage 1 (Infancy): Trust vs Mistrust**
 - The infant will either foster hope or tend to withdraw and become wary.
 - The caregiver provides a secure environment with regular love, affection, and nutrition.
- **Stage 2 (Early Childhood): Autonomy vs Shame and Doubt**
 - The child will either foster a strong will or develop compulsive tendencies.
 - The caregiver encourages self-sufficiency while maintaining a secure environment.
- **Stage 3 (Play Age): Initiative vs Guilt**
 - The child will either foster a sense of purpose or develop inhibitions.
 - The caregiver encourages, supports, and guides the child's own initiatives and interests.
- **Stage 4 (School Age): Industry vs Inferiority**

- The child will either foster a sense of competence and diligence or may become passive and disinterested.
- The caregiver sets reasonable expectations at home and at school, with a balance between praise and reprimand.

2.5.1.2 Adolescent stage.

- **Stage 5 (Adolescence): Identity vs Identity confusion**
 - The adolescent will either foster fidelity and commitment or experience abandonment and rejection.
 - Adolescents are required to balance their previous experiences, aspirations, and societal expectations while establishing values and forming their identities and who they are.

2.5.1.3 Adulthood stages.

- **Stage 6 (Young Adulthood): Intimacy vs Isolation**
 - The young adult is attempting to foster love instead of seclusion.
 - During young adulthood, individuals tend to form close bonds, lasting friendships, and long-term relationships.
- **Stage 7 (Adulthood): Generativity vs Stagnation/Self-absorption**
 - The adult attempts to foster care for others and avoids rejection and egocentricity.
 - The adult is attempting to engage with the next generation through parenting, coaching, or teaching.
- **Stage 8 (Old Age): Integrity vs Despair**
 - The adult in old age fosters wisdom and tries to avoid disdain.
 - People in their old age reflect, contemplate and acknowledge their life accomplishments.

According to Kerpelman and Pittman (2018), Erikson insisted that 'identity develops continuously throughout life' but emphasised that identity is 'consolidated in adolescence' (p. 311). The second theory is Marcia's identity status theory which postulates that there are four statuses of identity (Marcia, 1980).

2.5.2 Identity formation paths

Marcia (1980) refined Erikson's theory by primarily focusing on adolescent identity. Marcia postulated that identity achievement is about the degree of exploration and commitment to an identity in the different life domains (Marcia, 1980). For Marcia, identity is either being re-evaluated or a commitment has been made to values, beliefs and goals. Upreti (2017) summarises these paths to identity as:

- **Identity Achievement:**
 - Identity achievement occurs when the adolescent has resolved any identity issues and confirmed their goals, beliefs, and values.
- **Identity Moratorium:**
 - This refers to a state of uncertainty regarding life choices and culminates in active exploration of possible alternatives.
- **Identity Foreclosure:**
 - This path occurs when adolescents accept traditional values and cultural norms, rather than determining their own values. In contrast, they may also go in the complete opposite direction to their parental values and cultural norms. Foreclosure entails strong commitments, without sufficient exploration of alternatives.
- **Identity Diffusion/Role Confusion:**
 - This path refers to unresolved identity crisis, failure to commit to goals, beliefs, and values. This stage is characterised by 'avoidance of issues and action, disorganized thinking and procrastination' (p. 55).

Identity is a complex phenomenon, and it is important to realise the implications that adverse experiences during adolescence can have on the identity formation of young people. According to Jyotsana (2016), struggles and disturbances during the process of identity formation may lead to adverse consequences, including role confusion, negative identity formation, doubt, and uncertainty. If we take motherhood and other childhood adversities into account, the women in the study may have encountered struggles in their identity formation processes.

2.5.3 Motherhood and identity formation

Motherhood welcomes a new phase in one's life; a new addition to one's identity. Lesser et al. (1999) found in their qualitative research that young women who have had their first child experience a 'new' stage of life. According to Wahn et al. (2005), age no longer plays a role in describing the widespread ceremony of the transition to motherhood and most women look forward to this transition, regardless of age. However, adolescents who assume responsibilities as adults prematurely, usually as early parental responsibilities ensue, have more difficulty developing their identity. When faced with difficult challenges, they can become vulnerable in adulthood (Dunlop & Tracy, 2013). There are, however, ways to counter the effects of early motherhood on identity formation. In a study of young mothers, self-esteem, a by-product of healthy identity development, was found to correlate with the acquisition of accurate parenting skills (Baker et al., 2009). Therefore, helping adolescent mothers overcome viable setbacks in their identity development may be crucial, not only to help them, but indirectly to help their children (Macintosh

& Callister, 2015). Cox and McAdams (2014) suggest that mentoring with the help of various stakeholders from one's own circle of relatives might not only ease the burden and duties of the adolescent mother, but also help her to undo the harm done to her identity development.

2.5.4 Social relations and identity formation

Additionally, literature states that adolescent identity is influenced by the social interaction of the people surrounding them in their bio-ecological system. Family plays an integral role in identity formation and has the potential for identity diffusion in the adolescent's own identity formation (Upreti, 2017). Furthermore, literature suggests that changes in identity can occur on an individual basis, or as part of a group dynamic. Adolescent development is influenced by a sense of group belonging and social identity. They often define their own sense of self in relation to their peers and find meaning in collaborative activities and experiences (Raymond & Johnson, 2021). These can have either a negative or a positive impact on identity formation. Peer groups can influence greater academic motivation and performance, development of social skills, and leadership potential. In contrast, negative peer pressure can lead to risky behaviour, alcohol and drug abuse, engagement in criminal activities, and vandalism. Owing to the fact that adolescents are exploring their own identities, it makes them more susceptible to peer pressure. Literature further indicates that adolescence is a turbulent time and, owing to technology, teenagers are less committed to establishing an identity at such a young age, which leads to higher rates of identity distress and to mental health issues such as anxiety and depression.

2.5.5 Trauma and identity formation

In literature, abuse and childhood trauma are linked to adverse effects on identity formation (Upreti, 2017). Adolescent girls who have been exposed to abuse and trauma, were more likely to struggle with identity formation and identity achievement. These findings correlate with research on sexual violence and extreme traumatic experiences, where women had a higher rate of mental health difficulties and identity achievement compared to other types of traumas and violence (Jakob et al., 2017; Shalka, 2019). Furthermore, Muldoon et al. (2019) found that sexual trauma causes shame and guilt, which has the potential to affect women's identity formation and sense of self negatively.

2.5.6 Redemptive identity

When women experience adversity through their lived experiences, the goal is to reflect on and create a sense of meaning-making; thus, creating a redemptive identity despite having had difficulties in life. A redemptive identity is about aiming to create a liberation of self by communicating growth or resolution (McAdams & McLean, 2013). McLean et al. (2020) indicate that a redemptive identity as a new beginning may 'restore the notion that the world is safe and fair' and create a sense of stability and hope for the

future (p. 2). The women in the study have experienced various adversities and the aim is to create a redemptive identity through the use of creative art-based techniques and reflection (see section 3.7).

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to describe early motherhood as a unique, multifaceted phenomenon for the individuals involved. I elaborated on the many challenges it holds for women, especially those from marginalised communities. These women experience a continuous challenge to balance early motherhood with the development of their identity during adolescence. Furthermore, I explored the factors which play a role in the extremely high numbers of teenage mothers worldwide, but specifically within the South African context.

The chapter aimed to give an overview of the multitude of consequences of teenage pregnancy, both negative and positive. Most of the literature focuses on the negative aspects, but in this specific study, it was important to focus on resilience in the young women's lived realities.

In the following chapter, the research methodology will be discussed that informed this study. This will include co-researcher selection and the specific context where the study took place. Furthermore, data collection instruments and data analysis methods will be discussed in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

‘Some knowings cannot be conveyed through language’ (Dunn & Mellor, 2017, p. 294)

3.1 Introduction

This study aimed to engage in a collaborative research study to explore the experiences of a group of young women who had become mothers during adolescence. This study was a consciously implemented social process steeped in social constructivism. A means of honouring the voices of the co-researchers required selecting a research approach in which the researcher remained ‘mindful about how her thoughts, beliefs, philosophical approach and methodology may influence the outcomes of the research’ (Petersen, 2020, p. 38). In addition, the researcher sought to fashion a creative space that honoured the voices of the young women and, in the process, provided valuable insider insight into how their identity formation was influenced by becoming mothers in adolescence. This chapter aims to discuss the research design and methodology that was used as the framework for conducting the study. To ensure quality research the researcher needed to be mindful in selecting a research framework and methodology that would open communicative spaces and ensure the scientific rigour of the research study. To do this, researchers in the field of qualitative research emphasise the importance of linking the theoretical ideas to the strategies and procedures that guide the study logically and systematically to address the research question. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Silverman, 2017; Mohajan, 2018). For this reason, this chapter provides greater insight into the research paradigm, design, and methodology that are outlined in Chapter 1. Furthermore, information will be shared on the context where the research took place, as well as on the recruitment of co-researchers. Additionally, in light of the vulnerable nature of the research focus and the journey to the identity formation of the co-researchers, it was important to ensure that the study adhered to sound ethical practices that value and respect the dignity, rights and contributions of the various co-researchers (Merriam & Grenier, 2019; Wood et al., 2019).

3.2 Positioning the Study

This study reinforces the stance taken by researchers and community activists who emphasise the importance of restoring hope in individuals within communities. Educational, psycho-social, socio-economic and future focus factors are influenced by unplanned adolescent pregnancy. The experiences and personal development of young people are complex phenomena that require a creative way to promote the dynamic voice and knowledge of young women globally. Women from poor socio-economic backgrounds are often confronted with multi-dimensional challenges related to limited access to health, infrastructural, educational, and economic variables. Therefore, it is acknowledged that whilst there are

several quantitative and qualitative research studies in this field of interest, there is limited research knowledge on how these experiences influence the formation of identity of women from poor socio-economic, peri-urban communities. Increased social research that collaborates with this particular cohort is thus required (Savickas, 2019).

3.3 Motivation for the Study

Early motherhood is a multifaceted phenomenon. The motivation to explore such a complex topic was triggered by my own experience as a teacher at a School of Skills. Many of the learners came from impoverished communities and often ended up in the vicious cycle of teenage pregnancy, just as their own mothers and grandmothers had. I concur with the school of thought that greater insight is required into the perceptions of early motherhood and the contributing variables.

However, the aim of the research was not only to gain insight into the variables surrounding this sensitive topic, but also to gain perspective into the women's lived realities. A thorough literature review provided the impetus for a study like this, which focused on exploring **with** a group of women from a marginalised community, how their lived realities of early motherhood have influenced their identity formation. It was important to provide a space for the marginalised voices of the women in the study to be heard using creative arts-based activities. The use of creative techniques ensured a non-threatening environment for engagement (see section 3.7). Furthermore, the motivation of the study was to engage collaboratively in knowledge production by acknowledging insider perspectives and identifying communities of support, as Jasmine alluded: *'Die gesels wat ons nou het, miskien kan dit sessies word wat ons gereeld doen. Ons ken mekaar nou. Hoe meer sessies ons het, hoe meer maak ons oop'* (The talking that we have now, maybe it can be sessions we have regularly. We know each other now. The more sessions we have, the more we will open up. FG: Jasmine, p. 20, line 14).

During the focus group discussions, the women were not only encouraged to face the realities of their own meaning-making processes but were also exposed to hearing their and others' voices. This hearing and engaging of lived realities created opportunities for the women to celebrate their own and others' resilience and strength. In the process of engaging with their own and others' lived realities in creative ways, the study hoped to elucidate, for all the co-researchers, how early motherhood had influenced how they perceived themselves and thus created a space in which they could re-imagine their identity. This was further done in the hope that young girls might realise that they have agency to make their own choices in life and be motivated to reach out for guidance within their community.

3.4 Scope of the Study Research Question

This study aimed to explore and gain deeper insight into how early motherhood influences the identity formation of a group of young women. The underlying premise of this study is that reality and meaning are socially constructed through interaction with the social, cultural, and physical world in which individuals live and move. Giving people a voice as partners and co-creators of knowledge within the research process required careful attention to the research questions, the methodology, and the research process in order to remain relevant to the research focus and the co-researchers related to the study (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Zuber-Skerritt, 2017).

Exploratory questions related to the complex nature of the study and the 'relationship between [...] facets of social life' (Schwab & Syed, 2015, p. 392) connected to the topic were guided by the following key research question:

What influence did becoming a mother during adolescence have on the identity formation of a group of women in a marginalised community?

The nature of the study sought the following subsidiary questions to unearth some of the major complexities related to community-based, participatory social justice initiatives and to provide information to describe the phenomenon (Schwab & Syed, 2015; Zuber-Skerritt, 2017). To explore the questions in ways that encouraged and enhanced the voices of the co-researchers, the arts-based activities navigated towards a subtle exploration of the subsidiary questions related to the key research question. These included:

- How do the women view themselves?
- How did early motherhood influence their identity formation?
- Which intrinsic and extrinsic variables have assisted or hindered them in navigating their lives?

The research questions were developed with the aim, purpose, and methodology of the study in mind.

3.5 Philosophical Stance

In this section, I found it important to explain the thoughts, values, and views that express the ways in which I sought to honour the lived realities of the women who collaborated in this study in a way that respected their autonomy and dignity. In acknowledging the voices and unique experiences of the women in this study, I aligned with the view of researchers that I remain reflective about my thought processes, beliefs and opinions as a researcher which might influence my interpretation of how their experiences as

teenage parents constructed their identity in their journey to womanhood (Creswell, 2014; Ormston et al., 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Petersen, 2020).

Whilst I sought to establish the knowledge base for this study to remain grounded in the 'women's own inputs, perspectives and reflections' (Petersen, 2020, p. 42), it was important that I sought to remain conscious of the way in which my beliefs and thought process might influence the research process. The research methodology I used was therefore influenced by the theoretical underpinnings which I sought to keep in mind. Throughout the study, I applied plausible links to phenomena, to the emergent meaning-making of the co-researchers, and to the collaboration experience for all the individual co-researchers and for me in the research process. (Creswell, 2014; Ormston et al., 2014; Zuber-Skerritt, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Petersen, 2020).

As knowing **with** and not **about** was the underlying perspective of my study, I understood the literature's importance of becoming *au fait* with paradigms that could serve as a framework and set of beliefs about reality that could shape my research worldview, research methodology, study trustworthiness, and ethical consciousness (Babbie & Mouton, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Silverman, 2017; Tracy 2020). Literature strongly suggested that the interrelated application of corresponding paradigms ensured validity, reliability, relevancy, and orientated action within the context of the study (Pham, 2018). Hence, a paradigm constituted the underlying assumptions I had about the research topic at hand. In this study, I chose to combine the social constructivist, interpretive, and transformative paradigms to ensure a rich description and in-depth insight into the phenomenon under study. The reasoning behind the combination of paradigms was to gain further insight into the lived realities and meaning-making processes of co-researchers concerning the research topic (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Silverman, 2017).

3.5.1 Social constructivist paradigm

This qualitative study was primarily positioned in a social constructivist paradigm. The research study was concerned with how women constructed their identities through the narratives of their lived realities and how this construction influenced their resilience. To this end, a social constructivist paradigm informed my approach to gaining insight into the lived realities of co-researchers and to explore the research topic of the study from the perspective of the women within a naturalistic setting. By adopting a social constructivist worldview, I acknowledged that there is no objective truth and that knowledge, reason and emotion occur amid relationships (Gergen & Gergen, 2012; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). I, therefore, concur with Gergen and Gergen (2012, p. 819) that social constructivism 'invites a posture of curiosity' within research. In addition, the literature reminds us that in opening various possibilities, the social constructivist paradigm has a deeply emancipating purpose that relinquishes a hold on those whose truth

is being told (Gergen & Gergen, 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Silverman, 2017; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The curiosity evoked by social constructivism, as well as all other paradigms, can be described along three dimensions, namely ontology, epistemology, and methodology.

First, ontology defines the nature of reality and what knowledge is implied by that reality; thus, there are no absolute truths about human behaviour, but reality is socially constructed by individuals (Nieuwenhuis, 2010). During our data-generation activities (see section 3.7) it was interesting to note the various ways in which the co-researchers' worldviews, experiences and their own meaning-making process afforded rich descriptions in the data. Listening to and witnessing the ways in which the women made sense of their experiences and life journeys, individually and collectively, validated the view in the literature that in studying complex phenomena, the researcher needs to acknowledge and give voice to the co-researchers as the experts of their own lives (Zuber-Skerritt, 2015; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Silverman, 2017). This reminds us that there are thus multiple realities and various interpretations of experiences and events. From the aforementioned, I agree with the literature that social constructivism takes on a relativist view (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Merriam, 2002; Pham, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). According to Galbin (2014), reality is dependent on context and is shaped by our social interactions. These interpretations of reality are created within language (Terre Blanche et al., 2006; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Discourse, which is the meaning and power of language, is used to refer to a particular framework of ways of understanding (White, 2004). In other words, we use words to construct social meaning within our realities. Words are therefore a framework for us to understand the world in which we live and how we view ourselves and others within this construct. This is how we, co-researchers in this CBPAR project, made sense and gave meaning to our individual and shared experiences.

Second, epistemology specifies the nature of the relationship between the person who knows and that which can be known (Galbin, 2014, Nieuwenhuis, 2010). Within social constructivism, the epistemology or the nature of knowledge is considered subjective, and both the researcher and co-researchers are responsible for creating knowledge during the entire research process (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). According to Terre Blanche et al. (2006), social constructivism strives to investigate how words, images and experiences have the power to create certain representations of people, objects, and situations. This, in turn, influences how we experience and view those people, objects and situations. Social constructivism regards objectivity as being impossible and says facts can 'never be impartial but are always the product of a question and a set of assumptions' (Burr, 2003, p. 152). Co-researchers' unique thoughts, feelings and experiences can therefore be seen as the products of systems of meaning within the collective and not only on an individual level. (Cibangu, 2010; Galbin, 2014; Terre Blanche et al., 2006; Pham, 2018). The epistemology within social constructivism is seen as scrutinising the concepts

of power, privilege, and oppression (Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Social constructivism aims to create suspicion with regard to the discourse we use to describe politics, gender, marginalised populations, and so forth. So, the epistemology in social constructivism is seen as transactional and subjectivist (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Galbin, 2014). Considering this, the decision was made to use a collaborative inquiry as the research process in this study. This study was informed by the needs and aims of the co-researchers as they relate to the phenomenon under study. The challenges related to adolescent pregnancy within this and other similar contexts. A collaborative inquiry was chosen because, according to researchers like Bridges and McGee (2011), it emphasises 'inclusive participation within a mutually beneficial research project where deep interpretive processes occur and members co-construct knowledge' (p. 213). The authors further state that in using collaborative inquiry 'communities can become empowered to understand, produce knowledge and bring about active positive change in their own lives' (Bridges & McGee, 2011, p. 213).

Lastly, methodology is the process of studying, practically, whatever is believed to be known (Nieuwenhuis, 2010; Galbin, 2014). It encompassed the strategies for collecting and analysing the data to keep it in line with the researcher's philosophical assumptions. It is, therefore, the task of the social constructivist researcher to unveil the unknown ideological assumption of realities within society and to critique those realities (Nieuwenhuis, 2010; Pham, 2018). Reality is made up of a malleable set of social constructions and the researcher aims to deconstruct and criticise forms of reality by showing how accounts of the social world are shaped in discourse (Mack, 2010; Creswell, 2014; Terre Blanche et al., 2014). To determine how meanings are created from discourses, a qualitative and naturalistic methodological approach is used. The co-researchers' unique thoughts, feelings and experiences are seen as products of systems of meaning that function on a social level instead of on an isolated, individual-level bound within a specific social context (Terre Blanche et al., 2006; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Pham, 2018). It was, therefore, important to reveal the interplay of dominance that exists in society and to disclose the needs and struggles of the co-researchers. For this reason, the methodology within social constructivism was no longer viewed as the highway to absolute truth, and likewise, methods were not deemed to provide assurances of impartial and generalisable facts (Gergen & Gergen, 2012). This does not mean that there is no absolute 'truth', but rather, that which is viewed as 'truth' depends on the social construct. Hence, the viewpoints of the research co-researchers were of the utmost importance (Pham, 2018; Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Online individual interviews, online focus groups, and visual representations were used in this study to engage the co-researchers. The activities used in this study enabled me to position the co-researchers' unobserved thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and views through creative ways to gain better insight into their lived realities. These meaning-making activities are central to the social constructivist paradigm, as the construction and expression of the lived realities of

co-researchers ultimately shaped their actions. Actions can only evoke positive change when the political and ideological impact on reality and knowledge is considered (Zuber-Skerritt, 2015; Pham, 2018; Merriam & Grenier, 2019)

3.5.2 Interpretive paradigm

In this study, the social constructivist paradigm was used in conjunction with an interpretivist worldview as they both assume that reality is socially constructed (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Interpretivism further focuses on how reality is interpreted. Thus, a single phenomenon, such as early motherhood, may have numerous interpretations since co-researchers interpret their world uniquely and act accordingly. The complexity of the phenomenon under study means that the researcher plays an integral part, as knowledge is believed to be mediated through the researcher. Pham (2018) further elaborates on the view that research outcomes are 'unquestionably affected by the researcher's own interpretation, own belief system, ways of thinking or cultural preference which cause too many biases' (p. 4). For this reason, I needed to remain reflective about my own thought processes, beliefs, and opinions and how these might influence the research process as it unfolded (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Remaining reflective allowed me to gain a greater sense of awareness over my biases and emotions that might strengthen the trustworthiness of the research process and consequent findings (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). As the women's experiences were central to the study, I needed to gain what Tracy (2020) refers to as an empathic understanding from the perspective of the co-researchers. Whilst, according to Mack (2010, p. 8), 'research can never be objectively observed from the outside rather it must be observed from inside through the direct experience of the people', I sought our collaboration to work through co-creating authentic knowledge that could contribute to the phenomenon and co-researchers related to this study. The use of an interpretive worldview, therefore, led me to gain a deeper understanding of the complex lived realities of the co-researchers in their unique social context (Creswell, 2014; Pham, 2018).

Whilst social constructivism and interpretivism are two paradigms that complement each other, there are, however, some differences. Both of these paradigms share the view that in order to understand the lived realities of the co-researchers, it is important to gain insight into how they make meaning of their experiences. From an interpretive worldview, human interpretations are critically important in understanding the phenomenon under study. Actions are socially interpreted, and usually in numerous ways by different co-researchers. An interpretive worldview means that actions and meaning cannot be separated if we mean to extract social significance. Furthermore, social context and individual circumstances inform actions and reasoning. In contrast, social constructivism places more emphasis upon discourse and interactions as ways of constructing meaning. Reality and knowledge are thus

dependent upon the human's experience of their world. Furthermore, social constructivism does not aim to include self-reflection, but the main aim lies in seeking an understanding of the phenomenon under study. This understanding is viewed through the lens of culture. Thus, being of a different culture to my co-researchers, self-reflection was a necessary inclusion to ensure that my presence had a minimal effect on the research findings (Chen et al., 2011; Creswell, 2014; Mertens, 2017; Pham, 2018; Bastalich, 2020).

In addition, I feel that it would have been incomplete if I had not added aspects of the transformative paradigm to the study. Working within a marginalised community necessitated the need to address the political and ideological impact on knowledge and on the social realities of the co-researchers. Social constructivism and interpretivism focuses on the understanding of the phenomenon under study, whereas the transformative paradigm, also referred to as critical inquiry by some theorists, aims to address issues of power and agency within society (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Pham, 2018).

3.5.3 Transformative paradigm

In the social constructivist paradigm, action plays an integral part in meaning-making. This lends itself to include the transformative paradigm. Within the transformative paradigm, inquiry aims to bring about social change through collaborative exploration. The transformative paradigm was included in this study as I was interested in how the co-researchers' lived experiences were affected by societal, political, and economic constraints and how they practise resilience as a method to oppose and subvert such oppression. The goal of the transformative paradigm and action research in this study, is to challenge archaic thought patterns, to transform oppression and to ensure a sense of agency in co-researchers' lives. (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Mertens, 2017). Within the transformative paradigm, this can be discussed along three dimensions.

Ontologically, the transformative paradigm is based on relativism, where reality is socially constructed using society, the media, and institutions. As a researcher working within this paradigm, I intentionally adopted an ethical and moral standard of conducting research while keeping the political, cultural, economic and social context in mind (Mack, 2010; Hammersley, 2013; Pham, 2018). From a transformative worldview, as a researcher, I had to ensure that I remained self-aware and sought to broaden my own understanding of the unique societal complexities that the co-researchers are confronted within the target community. In my research journey, I came to concur with Creswell (2014, p. 38) that the transformative paradigm aims to instil an 'action agenda to help marginalised peoples'. This study sought not just to know about the women and their experiences, but instead to know with them how we can collaborate to explore the current needs of the co-researchers and how broader societal issues

can be addressed. I remained sensitive not to further marginalise the co-researchers but to create a platform for their voices to emerge and be part of the prospect of reform and transformation. (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

From an epistemological viewpoint, knowledge is 'produced by power and is an expression of power rather than truth' (Riyami, 2015, p. 414). It is believed that the 'truth' the co-researchers had about their own lives and social context was not an objective truth but rather, was instilled by the oppressive structures under which they lived. It was therefore imperative that the research study produced knowledge from the voices and experiences of the co-researchers' own realities and ensured that they had freedom of expression. For co-researchers to implement agency and critical self-reflection, participatory action research was used as the methodology required for reform. From a methodological standpoint, I attempted to understand the co-researchers' subjective experiences using online individual interviews and online focus group discussions. Furthermore, it was important to realise that I, as the researcher, needed to adhere to the rules of the community that I entered and to sustain relationships within that community. Thus, I chose to use visual methods of expression together with verbal discourse in a collaborative manner (Riyami, 2015; Merriam & Grenier, 2019; Zuber-Skerritt, Wood & Kearney, 2020).

In conclusion, the combination of paradigms from which I worked, sought to uncover co-researchers' subjective truths, and lived experiences while co-constructing a system of meaning in a collaborative process that warranted rich descriptions of the phenomenon under study.

3.6 Research Methodology

Acknowledging the co-researchers as the experts in their lives required that this study consider how we can illuminate how the women navigate through their lives. According to Marshall and Rossman (2016), one views them as the experts in their own lives and it requires the researcher to encourage ongoing reflection of how the research will be conducted. It positions the researcher in the social world of the co-researchers and uses a research approach that seeks to create an opportunity for two-way dialogue among co-researchers. According to Palus and McGuire (2015), dialogue 'is a kind of conversation that balances advocacy of one's opinions, with inquiry into these opinions and their underlying assumptions, all while building shared meaning' (p. 692). This qualitative approach is mindful of ensuring equitable power and knowledge sharing, and flexibility in decision-making and implementation of creative data generation. This study allowed an opportunity to communicate in verbal, non-verbal and symbolic gestures (see section 3.7). In making every effort to be responsive as the research process unfolded, it required dynamic and extensive preparation for the individual- and focus-groups sessions. The co-

researchers and I played an active agentic role in the various phases of the research process. By using a qualitative research approach, underpinned by the research philosophy, I worked within a framework in which I mediated the generation of scientific data sets, which provided me with thick and rich descriptions of co-researchers' perceptions and meaning-making (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

3.6.1 Research design

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2018), the research design describes the integration of the theoretical paradigms with the methods of generating data and the analysis thereof. It places the researcher within the empirical world that includes the co-researchers and their lived realities. According to Akhtar (2016), the research design is the plan and structure of the enquiry developed to address the research questions/focus. The purpose of research design is to acquire evidence to address the research objectives. For the purpose of this study, I used an exploratory research design.

I chose to conduct a qualitative research study because a qualitative design is about 'understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences' (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 6). It further assumes that there are multiple realities with no objective interpretation. In addition, according to Creswell (2014), qualitative research aims to explore social phenomena from the co-researchers' point of view within a natural setting. To this end, I sought to create the study as a space in which the proposed data-generation activities would be shared with the co-researchers in a way that encouraged freedom of expression and shared experiences of co-researchers during their meaning-making process related to the phenomenon under study. In developing my research design, I allowed my framework to be informed by the philosophical paradigms I had selected (see section 3.5).

Additionally, I preferred a qualitative research design as my aim was not to generalise the findings but to engage collaboratively in discourse about the co-researchers' lived realities and to provide a platform for their voices to be heard. Thus, seeking to elicit thick descriptions of the phenomenon under study was a key part of the research process (Tracy, 2020). Thick descriptions allowed for moving beyond the superficial aspects and exploring the contextual factors that influence behaviour and decisions. It was imperative that each co-researcher could express their worldviews and the meanings they had created from their lives, experiences, and relationships in an environment where they felt understood (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Tracy, 2020).

Within qualitative research, the researcher plays a distinctive role. My role within the study impacted the data gathered as the researcher is seen as the primary instrument for data collection. A qualitative data

collection approach opened up pathways for the co-researchers to tell their own stories or narratives about how they make sense of their life experiences and contexts. Throughout the study, I purposively sought to seek opportunities that elicit or celebrate the voices of the women in this study. Mindful of different levels or ways in which the women felt comfortable sharing their experiences, I tapped into my training as a trainee educational psychologist and an art teacher. Ethically, researcher-focused practice allowed me to use data generation activities with which I had some experience and about which I had consulted with my supervisor. As the journey unfolded, I realised that self-reflexivity and consultation with my supervisor, were a critical part of ensuring that I did not project my own assumptions and predictions on the study. Rossman and Rallis (2017, p. 98) caution that 'prediction is seen as an undesirable goal because with prediction likely comes social control'. Qualitative research, therefore, allows the researcher 'to understand how people experience and make sense of their life-worlds' (Mouton, 2017 in Petersen, 2020, p. 44).

3.6.1.1 Participatory action research (PAR).

Keeping in mind the social constructivist paradigm from which I worked, a participatory action research design was used. Action research is a 'dynamic educative process, an approach to social investigation, and an approach to taking action to address a problem or to engage in socio-political action' (MacDonald, 2012, p. 36). Tetui et al. (2017) remind us to be consciously mindful of power relations between researchers and the participants in a study. They caution that we should seek to equalise power relations by acknowledging participants, or more aptly, co-researchers as 'generators of knowledge' (Tetui et al., 2017, p. 104). In this study, I align with Zuber-Skerritt's (2015) view that in adopting a participatory action research stance, the researcher creates a space that allows people to construct their own meanings by having their voices heard.

According to Tracy (2020), within a PAR research design, the researcher and co-researchers work collaboratively to help address and understand the phenomenon under study, and to strive for social justice. Co-researchers, therefore, work collaboratively to take a significant role in the decision-making process during the research. Participatory action research, therefore, allows the co-researchers not only to speak for themselves, but view the other role-players as experts in their own lives as well. The idea is further elaborated on by showing respect for each other's decision-making process and ability to work collaboratively on the research project with the greater community (Esau, 2015; Zuber-Skerritt, 2015; Wood, 2017; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Community-based participatory action research (CBPAR) elaborates on this concept by including the community in addressing social injustices. Interestingly, Datta et al. (2015) indicate that marginalised

communities often lack the voice to control their own internal community problems and consequently look to outsiders for solutions. In contrast to this, CBPAR engages the marginalised to seek local solutions within themselves and their community, evoking real change (Esau, 2015; Wood, 2017). The co-researchers were partners within the study and retrospectively reflected on their own realities and produced their own alternative ways of understanding and coping with contextual challenges which enabled self-efficacy (Kusago & Miyamoto, 2014; Herr & Anderson, 2015; Zuber-Skerritt, 2015). According to Esau (2015), CBPAR is, 'an important collaborative methodology for addressing local concerns' (p. 68). This study, therefore, sought to engage in a methodology that allowed the voices of the marginalised to be heard in the most meaningful way possible throughout the study (Mertens, 2017). Whilst I proposed the focus of the study, in presenting it to the co-researchers, I opened our dialogue to afford what Gergen and Gergen (2012) propose: the primary researcher allows the community's pressing concerns to function as a stimulus or refining of foci for inquiry to inform social change. This is the essence of participatory action research. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016, p. 50–53), action research encompasses different principles:

- Action research focuses on a situation that can be viewed as problematic.
- The research design develops throughout the process owing to the actions of both the researcher and co-researchers, who work collaboratively.
- Co-researchers play an active role in the research process to address the contextual phenomenon.
- The lead researcher influences the process and must be taken into consideration.

Following on from this, it was decided to take a community-based action research approach as it recognises the fundamental importance of involving community members as active partners during research (Wilson, 2019). For this study, the 'community' meant collaborating with the women in Ukomelela. The figure below reflects the thoughts that informed my thinking and guided my shift to CBPAR:

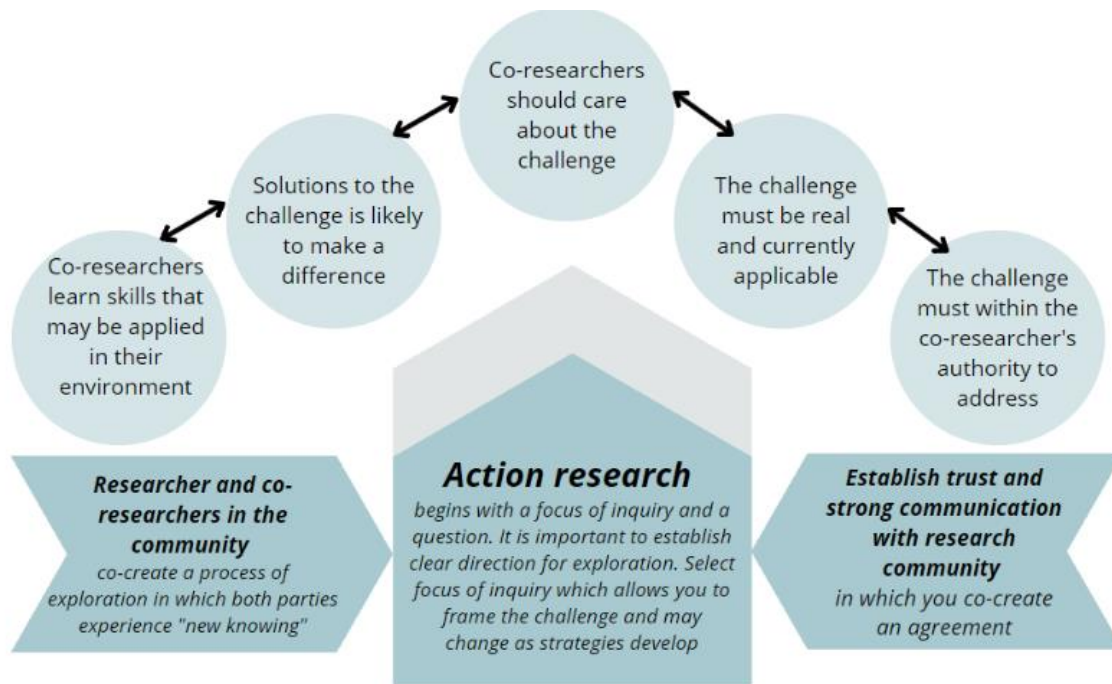


Figure 3.1. Community-based action research (Source: <https://techarticles.wordpress.com/2011/03/26/system-transformation-and-action-research>)

In Figure 3.2, I present how the process of community-based action research was implemented in this study:

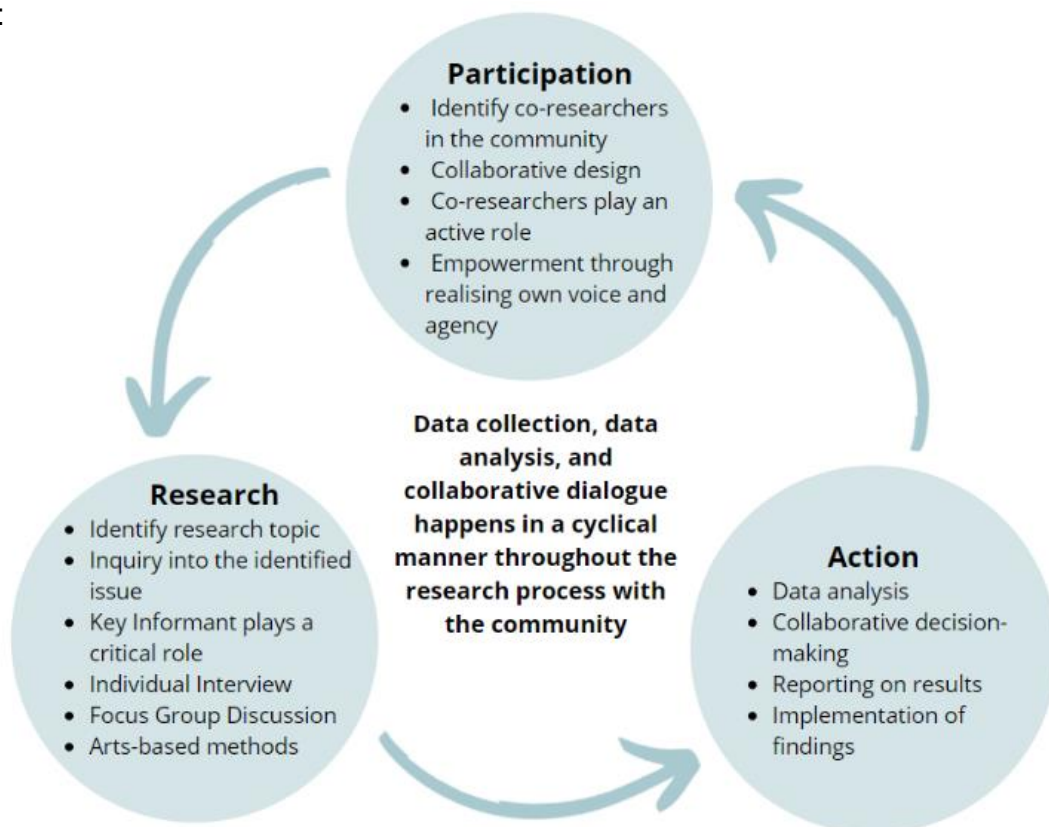


Figure 3.2: Community-based participatory action research process (Source: Author)

3.6.2 Co-researcher recruitment

Qualitative research aims to understand the meaning of the phenomenon from the vantage point and lived experiences of the co-researchers involved in the study. In the light of the exploratory nature of this endeavour, data gathering was a crucial step in the research as it contributes to a better understanding of the theoretical framework and the phenomenon under study. Whilst substantial research has been conducted on the phenomenon, there is limited research that leads the voices of often marginalised women. The study sought to stimulate a dialogical space in which the conversations would afford access to the deeper, first-hand insight into the women's experiences of adolescent motherhood (Wassenaar, 2010; Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

3.6.2.1 Research context and community.

Understanding the context of the research community enables a more nuanced view of the phenomenon under study. It further provides information about the unique challenges that the women experience in their complex social, economic, familial, and community contexts. During my exploration with the women of Ukomelela, I sought to gain insight into the multifaceted aspects that contribute to and influence early motherhood and the effects these have on the women's lived realities.

Ukomelela is a small peri-urban community in the Western Cape. Although members appear to have a positive outlook, the community is unfortunately plagued by social and economic issues, such as drug and alcohol abuse, gangsterism, crime, unemployment, and teenage pregnancy (Community Empowerment Project, 2020). Although multiple initiatives from outside the community have been launched to enhance positive change, it appears futile if change is not established from within. This sentiment was further echoed by the co-researchers when they voiced that ownership of the problems needs to be taken by the community members themselves.

This CBPAR study sought to utilise the resilience and creativity of its members as a catalyst for positive change from within the community. This was done by exploring the lived realities of women who have had first-hand experience of early motherhood and their sharing of their meaning-making journeys of growth and resilience. By engaging in conversation with the co-researchers, I sought to understand the research question from their unique perspectives and subjective experience as they were regarded as experts of their own lives (Gorman et al., 2005).

3.6.2.2 Co-research sampling and recruitment.

The study aimed to provide rich descriptions of how motherhood during adolescence influenced women's identity formation and perceptions of resilience. In seeking to identify the women who could enrich the

study, I consulted with a woman from a previous research project together with my supervisor, who was active in various community empowerment projects. Ellen was a key informant in the project and negotiated my access to potential co-researchers and the community. She became what Merriam and Tisdell (2016, p. 129) refer to as a 'valuable guide in the unfamiliar territory'. In my initial conversations with the key informant, Ellen, I informed her of what it might mean when referring to the participants as co-researchers in the study. In this study, I encouraged the active participation of the women and, according to their views or inputs, I remained open to requests for methodological data generation alterations (see section 3.7.2) as the project unfolded. Preissle and deMarrais (2011, in Pope, 2020, p. 3750), recommend, 'an interaction between researcher and research participant that generates the information or data sought where knowledge flows both ways between researcher and participant'. In addition, it was important for the key informant, co-researchers, and me to specify the functions and roles for each party (e.g., designating which party collects data from the other) (Walsh, 2014).

In my exploration of the literature related to the action research design, I decided that the best fit for this study would be a small number of co-researchers, intentionally selected via non-probability sampling. Within non-probability sampling, I chose to use purposive sampling in that it allowed me to select co-researchers based on the characteristics of a population and who had the potential to add value to the study (Cohen & Manion, 2011; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Because of their real-life experience, I was of the view that the women who would be willing to participate in the study, could provide the study with in-depth information about the research phenomenon, were willing to participate and were available to participate (Cohen & Manion, 2011; Patton, 2015; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Keeping in mind that the research topic is of a sensitive nature, this method of sampling works through trusted social networks to engage with specific individuals who meet the criteria; who then, in turn, are asked to recommend other relevant individuals. The key informant, Ellen, played an active role in accessing the co-researchers through snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a form of purposive sampling widely regarded as an effective technique for accessing, including hard-to-reach population groups in a study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I shared with the key informant which type of informant I thought would enrich insight into the phenomenon and to consider ways in which we could support other women or young women beyond our research circle. The criteria for inclusion in the study was that co-researchers be women, who, although currently older than 18 years of age, had become pregnant during their adolescence, had left the formal education system, and resided in the research community of interest.

Initially, a group of eight women showed interest in the study. During the online semi-structured individual interviews, two of the women disclosed that they had become pregnant in their early 20s. They were

informed that they did not meet all the requirements of the study and that, whilst we appreciated their willingness to participate, we would not be able to include them in the study. Therefore, six women were included in the final study. Throughout the research process, the co-researchers were reminded that they had the right to respond only to questions or requests with which they felt comfortable, and that they were able to withdraw from the study whenever they decided to. In qualitative research, and since the research study aims to provide an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences and the meaning-making of co-researchers, a small sample size is acceptable if it offers 'expected reasonable coverage' within the research community (Patton, 2015, p. 314). The aim of the study was not to generalise findings, but instead to open the research space to give a voice to the often-marginalised women. I, as the researcher, aimed to explore **with** the group of women ways in which they had navigated becoming mothers during their adolescence and how this experience may have impacted their identity formation and life choices. It is important to note that this study delimited itself to the experiences of marginalised women in the research context and does not presume to speak for all women who have become mothers during adolescence within the community or the broader South African context.

The women were also informed that they would be asked to share biographical information during the research process, such as their ages at pregnancy, their level of schooling and employment history. I explained that this was necessary to contextualise the study. In Chapter 4, I present a brief table to introduce the women who participated in the study.

3.7 Data Generation Within a Virtual Space

Reflective praxis became much more than a theoretical construct and so I always sought to remain mindful of the ethical parameters of this study. To create the authentic voices of the co-researchers to be heard, I adopted a qualitative approach to inform my decision making when determining how specific data generation methods could be used. Data generation methods refer to how I gathered data for the study, which included online individual interviews and online focus group discussions. Thick descriptions and rich data needed to be gathered to address the research question, and therefore a variety of methods were included (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I decided to include arts-based methods to elicit the data from co-researchers in a non-threatening way.

Initially, data generation was to occur at the key informant's home within the community. Unfortunately, owing to the safety protocols and the ethical procedures instituted by the REC at Stellenbosch University, no researcher was allowed to collect data in person during the Covid-19 stipulated period. Whilst the REC approved the study in 2019, the onset of the pandemic and resultant safety protocols meant that I had to review and share with my supervisor and the Departmental Ethics Screening Committee (DESC)

how my data collection process could be adapted. Methods of data generation, therefore, needed to be reconsidered to keep within the timeframe allowed for the completion of master's in educational psychology and the guidelines of the Health Professions Council. I consulted with critical friends and my supervisor and considered the way that data collection could be done virtually. In addition, the relationship of the key informant changed from being a contact person to an active co-facilitator in creating virtual access for co-researchers and in mediating some of the arts-based methods to elicit the data from co-researchers in a non-threatening way. According to Palus and McGuire (2015, p. 692), using images and creative artefacts have numerous benefits to encouraging dialogue, including:

- Creative artefacts become projectives onto which different perspectives and points of view get transferred
- Creative artefacts provide a 'wealth of metaphors to the conversation that serve as tools and content of thought'
- Creative artefacts 'help to integrate left- and right-brain cognition and require eye-hand engagement, which leads to whole-person attention and generative listening'
- Creative artefacts provide something tangible 'that enables mutual exploration and shared meaning making'

The Covid-19 pandemic has rapidly transformed how data generation was done in the virtual space. This required me to be reflective and to do additional research about how one would be able to navigate communication as the research process unfolded. The responsibilities placed on me as the researcher, required me to rethink how I would use my therapeutic skills as an intern educational psychologist, using the new unfamiliar virtual realm. I was expected to continue working virtually whilst understanding how to adapt to the shifting dynamics presented by not meeting face to face with new collaborators (Bilotta et al., 2021). Effective communication was not only known through creating the traditional research communicative space but was now also used with various forms of technology (Bilotta et al., 2021). Initially, I thought the biggest challenges would relate to devices and data; however, access to connectivity because of infrastructural limitations in their community context presented a significant challenge. The WhatsApp application was generally accessible to most mobile phones; however, making use of a mobile phone to conduct interviews was problematic as internet connection often interrupted access, and so parts of the conversations often needed to be repeated. Patience and calmness were vital during these interruptions and the transactional model of communication was kept in mind.

The transactional model is a widely-used communication approach. According to Nursekey (2017), to enhance communication, one needs to be mindful of the context, source, and destination (sender or receiver), message, code (e.g., words, visual images and non-verbal communication), channel, and communication barriers such as noise levels (p. 1–2). Figure 3.3 describes how the transactional model works in practice and how these factors may influence communication:

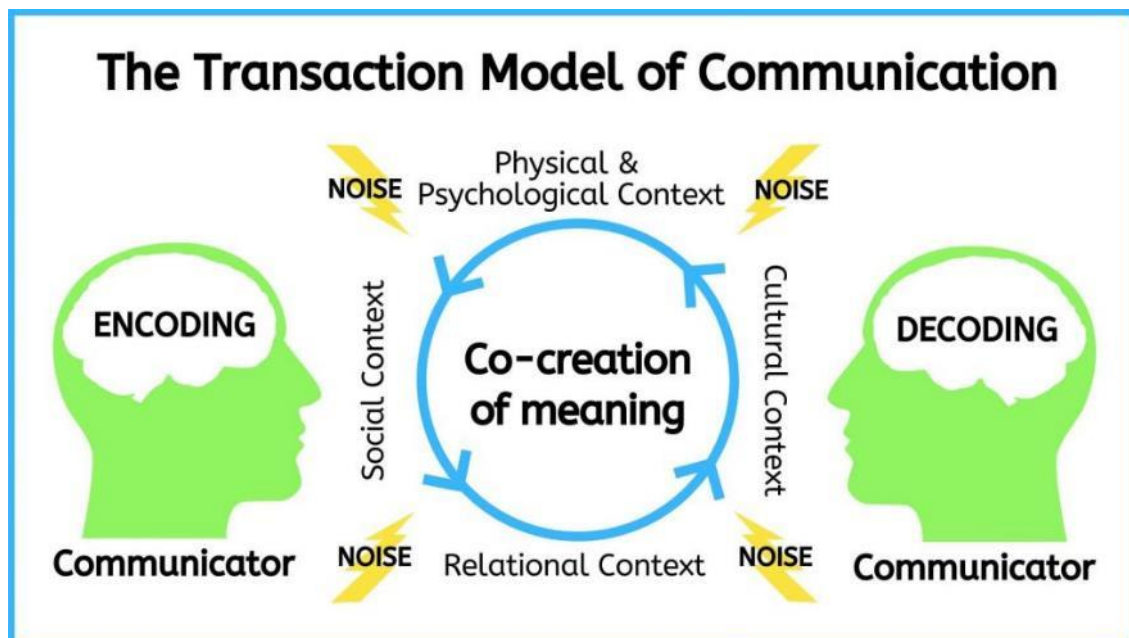


Figure 3.3. An adaptation of the transactional communication model (Source: Jones, 2017)

An important part of the research process was to ensure that I remain mindful of how the co-researchers make sense of their lived experiences and the active process of creating meaning related to the phenomenon under study (Wood, 2013, as cited in Nursekey, 2017). To honour the co-researchers in addressing this sensitive topic, it was important to ensure that they felt heard in the online space. Not being in physical proximity to the co-researchers and responsive to co-researchers' moments of vulnerability, was particularly challenging. I had prepared myself for using the Rogerian skills I learned during my years of teaching and training as an educational psychologist. I realised that I would have to consider how I would be able to use these to connect in diverse ways. Learning from the experiences of other therapists who shared the lessons they learnt from navigating online communication with clients, I learnt that regular reflection on what I was hearing and seeing during our research discussions was important. Furthermore, I used active listening, empathic understanding, and genuineness during the interviews and focus groups. In extremely emotional situations, I reminded the women that they might make use of a psychologist, as stated in the consent form (see Appendix C).

Another significant responsibility that needed reconsideration during the Covid-19 pandemic, was the health and safety of the co-researchers during data generation. Therefore, an online platform was chosen. Unfortunately, not all the women who indicated their willingness to participate had access to a mobile phone that was able to use the WhatsApp application.

During the commencement of the interviews and focus group discussions, I reminded the co-researchers of the general Covid-19 safety protocols and ensured that there was sanitiser at the key informant's home. Kiah, therefore, played an active role in maintaining social distance and ensuring a safe and secure environment for the women to come together. In this study, the key informant was a representative of women, in a marginalised community, who experienced young motherhood and adversity. According to Cossham and Johanson (2019), a key informant is someone within the community who is willing to share knowledge and expertise. Key informants have insider information into the research topic and are representative of that population. Furthermore, the key informant played a more active role in gathering data. As she was aware of research activities and had previously engaged in various research projects, she accepted the challenge to ensure a collaboration between a physical and a virtual space. The co-researchers knew the key informant well and felt comfortable within her space as they often spent time together outside of the study. This confidential space allowed the co-researchers to give a voice to their unique experiences and to reflect on how they influenced their own identity formation. The following diagram gives a visual representation of the vital roles that the key informant played within this study:

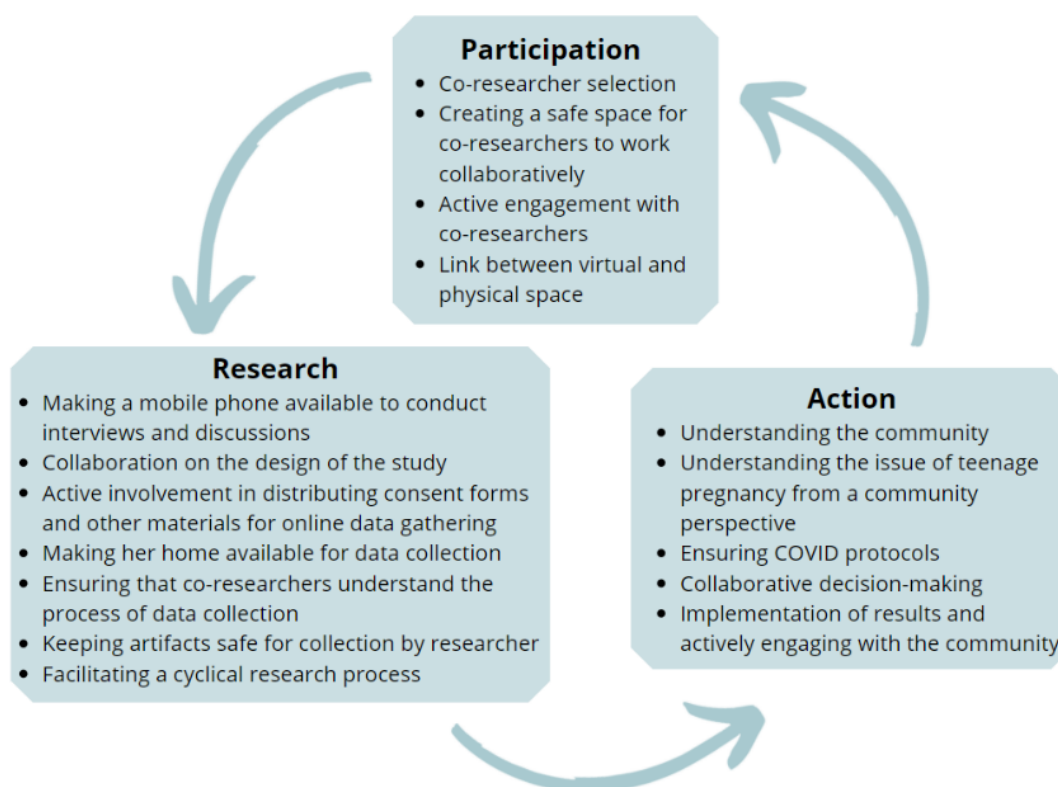


Figure 3.4: Roles of the key informant (Source: Author)

All of the co-researchers were familiar with each other and were comfortable discussing topics with like-minded individuals who had had similar experiences to them. As Wanda declared to the group:

'Maak oop. Niemand gaan oor niemand se goed praat nie. Ons maak oop en so ek verwag almal moet oopmaak, asseblief. Niemand moet skaam wees nie.' (*Open up. Nobody will speak of anybody else's stuff. We open up and I expect everyone to open up, please. Nobody must be shy.* FG: Wanda, p. 13, line 21)

Mutual trust was established by the co-researchers and facilitated by the key informant. Information packs with the consent forms, in both English and Afrikaans, as well as stationery, art materials, and sanitisers were delivered to the key informant's home. She played an active role in distributing packs to each woman before their online individual interview and focus group discussions. The co-researchers were often reminded that participation was voluntary and that they had the right not to answer any question or to withdraw from the study completely. Six co-researchers participated in the online individual interviews and only one of them could not make herself available for the focus group discussions.

To ensure accurate representation in the data, permission was asked of the co-researchers to audio- and video record the individual interviews and focus group discussions. All data were generated using an online platform and the women utilised the key informant's home and cell phone. The audio and video recordings helped me to focus on the discussion and to facilitate the conversations instead of having to make extensive process notes verbatim. This allowed me to honour their voices authentically within the research study. I concur with Denzin and Lincoln (2018) who state that data generation is a process of discovery, not only of the research phenomenon but also of the self. Data generation was a collaborative process between the researcher and the co-researchers, as is the standard in action research. We agreed to delete the audio and video recordings on the key informant's mobile phone, in their presence, after I had ensured the data sharing.

Individual semi-structured interviews and two focus group discussions were the main tools used to generate data. During these sessions, creative arts-based methods were used. These included clay models, 'River of Life' maps, 'photo voice' and/or collages. These methods were used to encourage the voice of the women to come forth in this collaborative manner. It afforded co-researchers the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and to gain self-awareness. Additionally, this led co-researchers to realise their resilience and encouraged shared ownership, which evoked social change. The different creative arts-based techniques used were as follows:

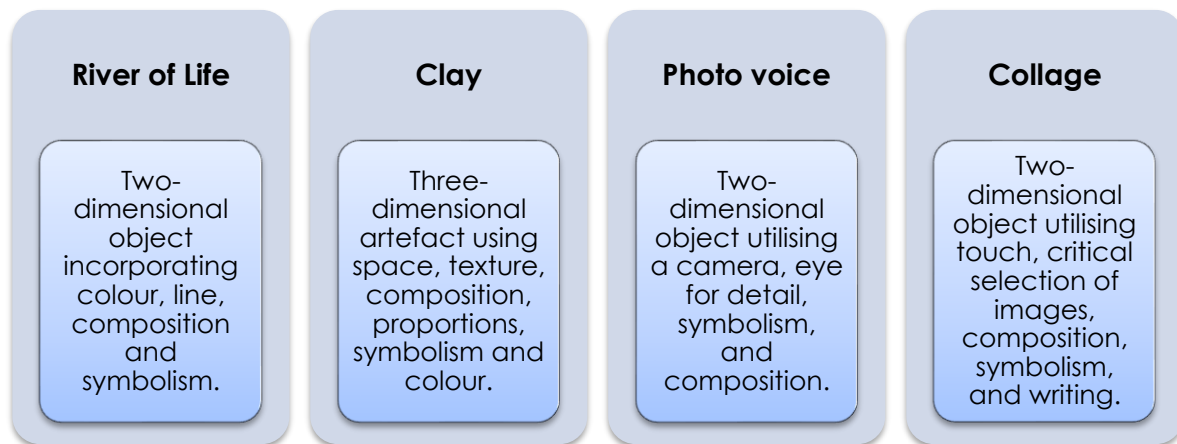


Figure 3.5: Creative arts-based techniques (Source: Author)

Creative methods were new to the co-researchers (see Appendix G for an activity guide), and the key informant facilitated the process of engaging with the art materials. In retrospect, the methods enabled the voices of the co-researchers to navigate their comfort in expressing their views verbally. I also kept a reflective journal to document the research process. This was used as part of the data, and excerpts can be found throughout Chapters 4 and 5.

3.7.1 Online individual interviews using the 'River of life' maps

Individual interviews are useful methods to gain in-depth insight into the lived realities of co-researchers. It enabled the exploration of ideas, experiences, feelings, and perceptions in a collaborative manner (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Semi-structured interviews also offered both myself and the co-researchers a measure of flexibility to respond and explore aspects as they arose from the discussion. In this sense, the individual interview was seen as a 'co-constructed conversation' that was jointly created (Tracy, 2020, p. 160). Denzin and Lincoln (2018, p. 1002) further suggest that semi-structured interviews make use of the 'knowledge-producing potentials of dialogues'; thus, relying heavily on the social construction of language within the context created. Additionally, the interview schedule was seen merely as a guide and not as a directive in the process as the co-researchers were viewed as the experts of their own lives.

As the study dealt with a sensitive topic, arts-based methods were incorporated into the online semi-structured individual interview. The 'River of Life' activity (see Figure 3.6) is a visual method that enables individuals to draw and express major life events in their past (Westraadt, 2017).



Figure 3.6: Examples of the 'River of Life' activity (Source: Author)

Using the 'River of Life' activity allowed co-researchers to engage in a non-threatening way and to explore their own inner worlds using the art elements such as colour, line, composition, and symbolism. It further created a platform where the women could determine to what extent, and what parts of their lived realities, they wanted to share with me. Co-researchers allowed me to engage collaboratively with their experiences of early motherhood and what impact this significant event had on their identity formation. The tangible 'River of Life' gave co-researchers the freedom to talk about their journeys and lived realities as young mothers. The 'River of Life' activity encouraged co-researchers to use the symbol of a river, and other natural objects, such as rocks, trees, fish, pollution, etcetera, to reflect on their own lived realities. It allowed them to externalise their internal worlds in a non-threatening and creative way. I, as the researcher, explained that the river represents key aspects of one's life, and high as well as low points are indicated in diverse ways. An example was shown to the co-researchers. I encouraged the co-researchers to elaborate on their drawings to the extent that they felt comfortable. Furthermore, I prepared an interview schedule (see Appendix E) with open-ended questions to facilitate the discussion around the research topic. The questions provided me with insight into the meaning-making processes of the co-researchers. This also allowed me to adapt the interview schedule cyclically as the research progressed. (Patton, 2002; Merriam, 2002; Bryman, 2006; Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Six women engaged in the online semi-structured individual interviews. The interviews were conducted in both English and Afrikaans, as was preferred by each individual co-researcher. Owing to the sensitive nature of the topic, I remained mindful of the potentially harmful effects the interview questions could have on some of the co-researchers. I, therefore, employed my therapeutic training to contain emotionally-laden conversations about adolescent pregnancy, the co-researchers' experiences of early motherhood, and the trauma that may have accompanied such events. I showed empathy and

unconditional positive regard for each co-researcher and engaged in a non-threatening, accepting manner. The online individual interviews lasted approximately 40 to 60 minutes and were scheduled at times convenient to the co-researcher. Each audio recording was transcribed verbatim to capture the unique nuances of each individual. The data were analysed, and the themes were used to guide the focus group discussions (see Appendix F) (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

3.7.2 Focus group discussions using clay, collage, and photovoice

According to Marshall and Rossman (2016) focus group members, all have certain characteristics which are valuable to the study. Within community-based participatory action research (CBPAR), focus group participants are considered co-researchers, who are vital to unlocking rich data for the research study from their first-hand experiences. Throughout the data generation process, I was cognisant of avoiding a researcher-directed group interview as is not the style of action research (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2011). The focus groups were thus designed around the co-researchers and took the form of a collective and collaborative conversation in which the focus was on the content, the interaction, and the development of democratic and participative relationships. I took care to listen to ideas and themes that the co-researchers brought up and facilitated the conversation actively to gain rich data. Since the conversations were on an online platform, the key informant navigated the conversation as well. This afforded me access to their meaning-making processes as they occur within a socially interactive space (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Bryman, 2016; Gameiro et al., 2018).

Two online focus group discussions were held. During these discussions, co-researchers focused on their experiences of navigating early motherhood and how this major life event had influenced their identity formation.

3.7.2.1 *The first focus group session.*

During the first focus group discussion, the co-researchers engaged in projective techniques, which included clay modelling and photo collage. Data generation using arts-based methods is theorised to be useful especially where sensitive or complex topics, such as adolescent pregnancy, are involved. Literature further states that projective techniques create distance between the women and their lived experiences, which has the potential to minimise any associated harmful effects they might have experienced during the re-telling of their stories (Daiute, 2010). This method allowed co-researchers to express themselves differently, especially when they did not necessarily have the words to express their inner worlds (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Gameiro et al., 2018). Projective techniques allowed me, as the researcher, to mediate the conversations in a way that the co-researchers felt comfortable sharing with one another. I was mindful of the fact that co-researchers may have felt extremely vulnerable sharing

their experiences in such an open space. The key informant played a significant role in navigating the women's anxiety around the topic. Because the data generation occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic, I could only contain and facilitate over an online platform. The key informant played a crucial part in the data generation process as she navigated and facilitated the discussions and emotions associated with that well. I was uncomfortable with this at first, but the women informed me that they had been part of a previous support group that had been facilitated by Kiah. Together we navigated the power dynamics at play in the research process and, in particular, the ethics prescribed by the REC as it created a significant understanding of CBPAR in action.

Owing to the sensitive nature of the study, it was essential to create a safe space for the women to share their stories. I was also mindful of how I responded to the information as literature suggests that the way the listener responds has an impact on the flow of the conversation and the way the storyteller remembers their lived realities (Pasupathi, 2001; Hardy, 2007; Jones, 2017). The key informant's house was utilised as a common space where all co-researchers felt comfortable to meet. Snacks were provided to ensure a relaxed environment where conversation and storytelling could ensue.

3.7.2.2 The clay.

Even though all of the women had come to know me in the online individual interviews before the focus group sessions, building online rapport together was important. I invited the women to create clay models as a way to introduce themselves and their stories to the group. Clay is considered a powerful medium to use in data generation (Sholt & Gavron, 2006). It is malleable and can engage all the senses. As an art teacher, I was experienced in making clay with added essential oils. The clay was intended to create an intense tactile and olfactory experience in a non-threatening manner. Adding to this, Sholt and Gavron (2006, p. 66) state:

'clay-work involves body expression through the physical work with clay, and mental processes through the act of modelling and through observing the product. Thus, it allows integration of emotions, memories, and fantasies from different levels of consciousness.'

According to scholars, clay engages with the body and can elicit memories, which can lead to powerful expressions of emotions (Ong et al., 2020). It was therefore essential to remain focused on the topic and we continually remained mindful of how we could hold each other in the emotional space as the need arose.

3.7.2.3 Collage and photovoice.

Thereafter, I demonstrated the use of collage and 'photo voice'. We discussed the ethical use of photography and the implications of visual data collection. 'Photo voice' is a data generation method used in CBPAR that involves the use of cameras to identify community assets and concerns (Chonody et al., 2013; Palus & McGuire, 2015). Literature suggests that 'photo voice' involves taking photographs and then decoding the visual images to identify themes that can be reflected upon. Harley (2012) found that this method worked particularly well with difficult topics and when collaborating with marginalised communities. The women had a choice between doing a collage and participating in a 'photo voice' activity. Four individuals chose the collage activity, and one co-researcher chose to do the 'photo voice'. The visual data served as a stimulus for discussion and gave the women a non-threatening platform to give voice to their lived realities. This interaction generated rich data of the phenomenon under study (Bryman, 2006; Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

3.7.2.4 The second focus group session.

In the second focus group discussion, the women and I reflected retrospectively on the process to that point and the emerging themes that were presented. The women expressed a catharsis during the process and a desire to give something back to the community for other young women to be able to navigate that journey. We initially decided to make a brochure with relevant information for young women in similar circumstances to guide them through such a forming time. However, keeping with the cyclical nature of the research study, we decided collaboratively to put key quotations from co-researchers' stories on posters and to distribute these within the community. It was felt collaboratively that young women needed to feel included in the conversation. Talking **with** them and not to them was important. They needed to feel that there was someone who understands what they are going through, someone who has gone through the same process. Considering the developmental phase of teenage girls of searching for independence, at that stage of life many young women were not open to conversations with adults whom they felt had no idea what they were going through, as Jeslyn confirmed by saying:

'...hoekom moet ek dan net aanmekaar vir die auntie luister, aanmekaar!' (Why do I have to listen to this lady all the time, all the time! FG: Jeslyn, p. 16, line 25) and 'ek gaan nie na die auntie luister nie' (I am not going to listen to this lady. FG: Jeslyn, p. 19, line 23).

The women played an active role in deciding on the purpose for the posters, which quotations were used, and the layout. I was responsible for the design and printing of the posters and the co-researchers were tasked with finding appropriate, high-traffic areas where the posters would be most effective. The purpose was to make young girls aware of the fact that they are not alone, that other women have had similar

experiences and similar stories. It was important for the co-researchers that the posters were encouraging to youth and had an ultimate message of 'We've been there too and we got through it', 'don't let this get you down', and 'we all have stories'.

Within qualitative research, data generation and data analysis occur simultaneously to align the process according to the emerging themes that surface. The co-researchers and I then reflected further in a cyclical manner on the data generated, thus influencing what happened in the next cycle of the process

3.7.3 Reflective journal

Qualitative research calls for a high degree of reflectivity on the part of the researcher. Therefore, in addition to the above-mentioned data generation methods, I also kept a reflective journal. According to Orange (2016), reflectivity aims to enhance various areas of research including data collection and data analysis. It further ensures ethical practice by making the researcher aware of their biases and opinions. My reflective journal had the aim of my continuously reflecting on the process and taking a critical stance on my own views and opinions. The inclusion of a reflective journal ensured triangulation of data with other sources of information. It was also a way for me to capture nuances between the co-researchers and to reflect on the group dynamics and their relationships (Orange, 2016; Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

My reflective journal not only afforded me a chance to learn about the women in the study, but it also created an opportunity for me to learn about myself and my own practices within research. As a researcher, I allowed myself the time and freedom of self-reflection and self-expression to improve my own learning and growth. Through writing and drawing, I became aware of my own thoughts, position, and feelings in relation to the co-researchers and the study in general. It served as an instrument that created a 'connection between theory and practice' (Bashan & Holsblat, 2017, p. 2). Furthermore, it allowed me a safe space to articulate my frustrations around virtual data generation and prompted me to consult regularly with my supervisor and critical friends (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

To reflect, multiple sources were used to generate data for the phenomenon under study. Many of the data sources used voice and language to reveal the inner worlds of the co-researchers. It was, however, felt that using arts-based creative methods allowed for a deeper exploration of the lived realities of the women. The topic was sensitive in nature and the co-researchers might, according to literature, more easily express themselves using CBPAR methods, such as 'photo voice', clay and collage (Franz, 2010; Kara, 2015; Dunn & Mellor, 2017; Cohen-Miller, 2017; Gameiro et al., 2018). Research conducted by Van der Vaart et al. (2018) found that using creative arts-based techniques as part of participatory action research allows the researcher to:

- Gain deeper insight into the co-researchers' lived realities by going beyond cognitive perceptions.
- Offer unique ways of contributing to community knowledge and further action within the community to evoke social change, which will benefit the larger research community.

Using these creative methods allowed me to engage in and mediate complex topics in novel and familiar ways by creating distance between the woman and her lived reality, which further had the potential to minimise harm (Daiute, 2010).

3.8 Data Analysis

In community-based participatory action research, data analysis is an ongoing, iterative process as the researcher and co-researchers reflect on and interpret the generated data in a cyclical manner that can influence what happens in the next cycle of the process.

Data were generated using semi-structured online individual interviews and focus group discussions using multiple creative arts-based techniques. Six co-researchers participated in the data generation process during this study. Furthermore, during the interviews and focus group discussions, the visual data were explored in greater detail so as not to lose any of the finer nuances of the visual artefacts. I was mindful to ask relevant questions about the research question and therefore used an exploratory guide (see Appendix E and F). The women in the study were reminded that they only needed to share what they were comfortable with and were often made aware of the services of an external psychologist, as discussed in the consent form (see Appendix B). To stay true to the co-researchers' lived realities and meaning-making process, I often reflected on their words and body language as a way of doing regular member-checks.

Figure 3.7 is a visual representation of the cyclical way that data generation and data analysis occurred:

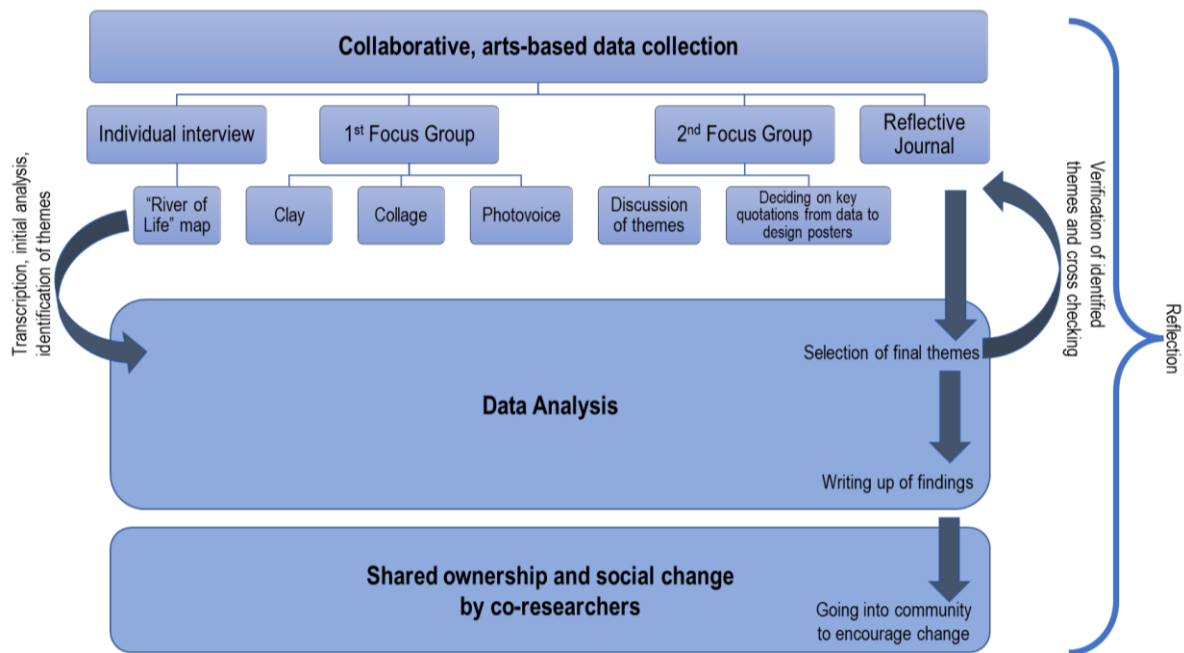


Figure 3.7: Cyclical process of data generation and data analysis (Source: Author)

The interviews and focus group discussions were audio- and video recorded with the permission of the women. These were transcribed verbatim, and I aimed to transform the raw data into accurate representations of the co-researchers' lived realities as described by their own words (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I ensured that my transcriptions were accurate by carefully checking them against the recordings. The re-reading of transcripts and re-listening to the recordings ensured a thorough immersion in the data. The transcriptions were then analysed using an iterative process of coding that involved the systematic exploration of data and categorising of the components to uncover their relationships and meanings (Patton, 2015). It guided me in refining the meaning-making process by repeatedly navigating between co-researchers' descriptions and my understandings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

I printed out hard copies of all the transcriptions to code the data by hand. It was important to stay true to the women's descriptions and to show respect for their own meaning-making processes; therefore, the women's written words were read attentively to gain a deeper understanding of each individual's voice. I was required to immerse myself in the raw data to make meaning of it by organising and summarising it according to emerging categories and themes that were in line with the research questions (Lapadat, 2010; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). As I was immersing myself in the data and refining the categories and themes, I reflected on what was written in my journal and incorporated that into the analysis. The cyclical nature of the data analysis process ensured that I consulted with my supervisor regularly. Throughout this process I made notes of possible categories, themes, and subthemes, as they emerged from the

data sets, thus using inductive coding (Saldaña, 2015; Deterding & Waters, 2018). Codes were assigned to units of meaning, such as words, sentences, and phrases. Furthermore, I used colour to assign codes depending on their relevance to the research focus (see Appendix H and I for the colour codes). After all the transcripts were read and re-read, I reflected on the main categories and themes that surfaced and started the thematic coding process. The visual data, including the collages, clay models and photographs, were thematically analysed by exploring the narratives that emerged during data generation. The aim of this was to gain an understanding of the co-researchers' experiences of motherhood and how this influenced their identity and resilience.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), a thematic analysis is considered to be a constructivist method in that 'it examines how events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within a society' (p. 10). The themes that resulted from the data analysis were compared to my initial understanding of each transcript. It was a continual process of seeking out new ways of seeing, exploring, and describing the lived realities of the co-researchers (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Additionally, in qualitative research, vast amounts of data are created, and the researcher has to remain mindful to use quotes and reflections that are useful in answering the research question (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In Figure 3.8, I illustrate the steps I followed in the data analysis process:

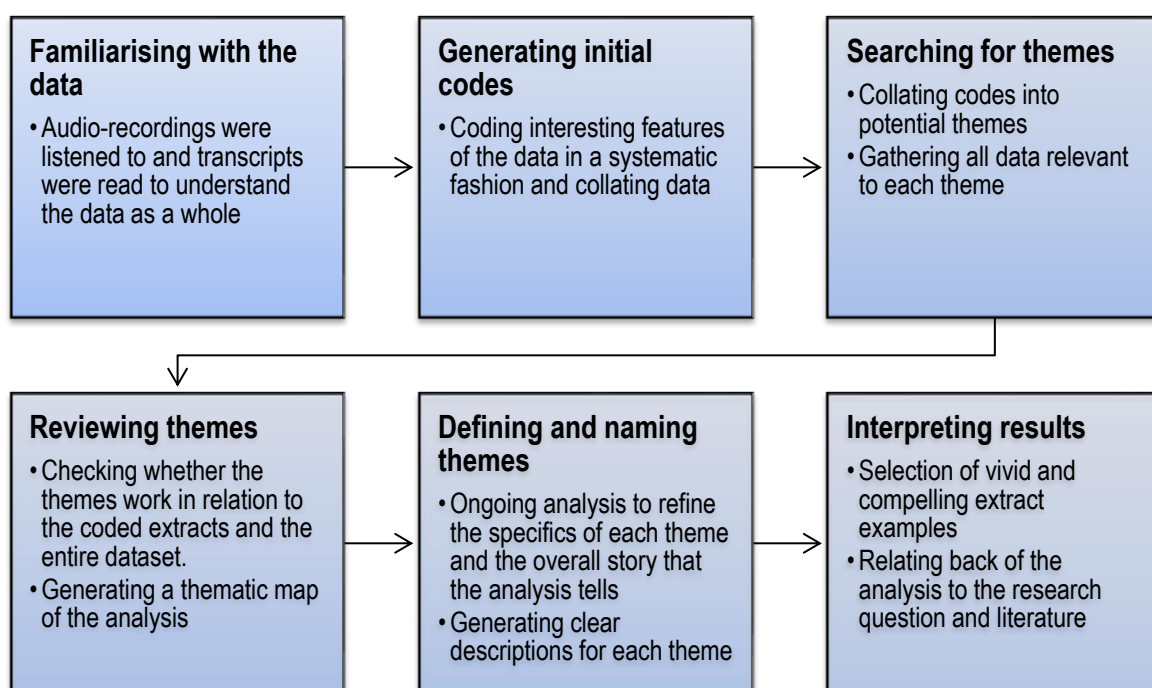


Figure 3.8: Steps in the data analysis process (Source: Author)

Furthermore, all the generated data from the online interviews and focus groups, clay models, photographs, collages, and my reflective journal were continuously compared to ensure trustworthiness.

After the main themes were identified, the co-researchers and I verified each theme to ensure conformability and respect for the women's voices. Once consensus was reached on the categories, I started the process of writing up the data, ensuring that I powerfully honour the women's voices. Throughout the process of data analysis, I remained cognisant of my influence in presenting their stories and reflected on how a virtual space was opened up for the women's voices to be expressed and heard through research.

The critical analysis presented here shows how the cyclical, and often messy, unfolding of a CBPAR project can result in the development of relevant knowledge that contributes to existing literature and aims to create a dynamic sharing of power between the researcher and co-researchers.

3.9 Data Verification Strategies to Ensure Trustworthiness of the Data

The goal of this research study was not to generalise the findings, but instead to gain a more in-depth knowledge of the phenomenon under study to draw links with current literature (Babbie & Mouton, 2013; Graneheim et al., 2017). Additionally, all research should be concerned with producing reliable and valid knowledge in an ethically sound manner. In qualitative research, the various approaches used to enhance the validity and reliability of a research study is referred to as trustworthiness (Creswell, 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). According to Lincoln and Guba (2013, p. 103) trustworthiness refers to 'the quality of an inquiry'. Therefore, to ensure that this inquiry is of high quality, four variables were taken into consideration, namely credibility, dependability, conformability, and transferability (Merriam, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Creswell, 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). The variables will be explained below.

3.9.1 Credibility

Credibility as a variable to trustworthiness refers to 'establishing confidence in the findings and interpretations of a research study' (Lincoln & Guba, 2013, p. 104). Babbie and Mouton (2013) elaborate on this definition by indicating that credibility pertains to the degree to which the collected data is accurate and whether the findings portray the truth of that which has been studied. The most effective way I ensured credibility was by implementing triangulation. Triangulation refers to the 'use of multiple sources of information to help minimise bias in the data and the research process' (Creswell, 2014, p. 185). To implement triangulation, the study used various sources of data collection at multiple points in time and utilised a variety of methods to gain a deeper understanding of the co-researchers' lived realities. The use of online individual interviews, two focus group discussions, reflection on the part of the researcher as well as observations, ensured rich and well-developed findings (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Furthermore, I regularly engaged in dialogue with critical friends (my supervisor,

educational psychologists, and mentors). I considered my critical friends as valuable contributors to the credibility of the study as their objective perspective was highly esteemed. Furthermore, a peer examination group was used to discern the opinions of the key informant, co-researchers, and colleagues (Nieuwenhuis, 2010; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Engaging in dialogue enhanced the credibility of this research study. Member reflection, as suggested by Tracy (2020, p. 278), creates 'a space for additional insight and credibility' with co-researchers that enhances the accuracy of interpretations through collaboration and elaboration. During data collection, I made use of probing and summarising to give co-researchers a chance to elaborate on, clarify, and verify their responses. Probes are characterised as questions or comments that researchers make, following the co-researcher's responses. It was deemed a facilitative method to solicit supplementary information from co-researchers (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). They were further asked to validate the accuracy of my interpretations of the visual data as well as of their responses during the interviews in the form of the transcripts. This allowed the research findings to be conveyed richly and descriptively. Thus, a shared experience was created by allowing for transparency and ownership by the co-researchers. Member-checking ensured that women were given a voice and platform to talk about their experiences without the fear of judgement. Additionally, it served as a method to strengthen the relationship between the researcher and co-researchers.

3.9.2 Dependability

Dependability refers to the extent to which the study will yield comparable results if it were to be repeated (Patton, 2002; Babbie & Mouton, 2013). This is, however, a problematic assumption in qualitative research, as people are not static but ever-changing and evolving. Reliability, therefore, assumes that there is a single reality that, from a social constructivist point of view, is fallacious. Thus, I concur with Creswell (2014, p. 251) that the more pertinent question is 'whether the results are consistent with the data collected'. To ensure that this occurred, I made use of an audit trail. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) elaborate that an audit trail describes in detail how several types of data were collected, how categories were decided upon, and how decisions were made throughout the research process. The audit trail, consisting of data, findings, and interpretations, was regularly reviewed by my supervisor. Furthermore, all interviews and focus group sessions were video- and audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure the dependability of the research.

3.9.3 Conformability

Conformability refers to the extent to which the data that was collected is a true and accurate reflection of the co-researchers' voices and not preconceived notions of the researcher. In qualitative research, the researcher is said to be the key instrument for data collection and data analysis (Merriam, 2002; Babbie

& Mouton, 2013, Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Creswell, 2014). To ensure conformability, it was of the utmost importance to honour and reflect the voices of the co-researchers. According to Banks et al. (2013, p. 267), 'all participatory research involves some degree of collaboration'. The collaborative nature of CBPAR places great emphasis on being mindful of power relationships. For research to counter power dynamics, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) argue that research needs to be done **with** the co-researchers and not **on** the co-researchers. Therefore, throughout the research process, I remained cognisant of my own worldviews, sets of beliefs, and experiences before entering the research process. This enhanced the trustworthiness of the study and encouraged the involvement of the co-researchers. We often reflected on the experience as it unfolded. I was mindful of the power relations related to the women, the key informer and me. Conducting this research during the Covid-19 pandemic changed the research dynamics from that which I had initially intended. I therefore continuously reflected, acknowledged, and shared my reactions, feelings, observations, and ideas regarding the research process. I used writing and drawing as internal reflective practices and regularly arranged meetings with my supervisor and critical friends to explore connections between knowledge and to review behaviours critically (Lew & Schmidt, 2011; Herr & Anderson, 2015).

3.9.4 Transferability

Transferability implies the extent to which the findings of the study are sufficient, as well as to the generalisability of the data to other settings (Babbie & Mouton, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Qualitative research does not aim to generalise the findings of the study but rather aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the women's experiences of early motherhood. Transferability is an essential part of action-based research in that it 'ensures that the research actions taken, lead to finding solutions to the problem(s) that initiated the study' (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 67). Rich, thick descriptions were provided regarding the setting, co-researchers and findings, based on adequate evidence. These were presented in the form of quotes from the online individual interviews, online focus group discussions and reflexive journal of the researcher (Merriam, 2002; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Additionally, co-researchers were carefully selected using purposive and snowball sampling to ensure adequate representation and maximum variation.

Data validation was ongoing throughout the various steps in the research process. So too was the consideration of ethical procedures. Throughout the process, I remained conscious of the need to engage in an ethically sound manner with all the co-researchers and their individual stories.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

There is a fundamental link between trustworthiness and ethics (Patton, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Special emphasis is placed on the researcher to conduct the study in as ethical a manner as possible. Rossman and Rallis (2017, p. 147) describe ethics as being an extension of the researcher's 'moral principles', which ultimately guides their actions. Everyone does not, however, agree on a set of moral principles. For this study, I aimed to adopt an *ethic of care* worldview. From this perspective, the researcher and co-researchers were considered morally interdependent, and interactions reflected mutual respect and reciprocity. These principles were crucial in the collaboration with the marginalised community. Throughout the research study, I was aware of the vulnerable nature of the women in the study and their engagement with the sensitive topic of early motherhood. The literature suggested three ethical considerations while pursuing qualitative research from an *ethic of care* perspective, namely procedural ethics, situational ethics, and relational ethics. (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Tracy, 2020).

3.10.1 Procedural ethics

First, procedural ethics entailed gaining approval from the University of Stellenbosch and internal research institutions before undertaking research involving human participants (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Rossman & Rallis, 2017; Tracy, 2020). According to the Policy for Responsible Research Conduct at Stellenbosch University, it was imperative to obtain ethical clearance from the University's research ethics committee while continually adhering to ethical rules as assigned to researchers by institutional review boards (Senate Research Ethics Committee, 2013). Only after approval from the Ethics Committee of Stellenbosch University (see Appendix D), did I commence with co-researcher selection and data collection.

Beyond the institutional ethical requirements of the university, I was obligated to ensure the well-being of each co-researcher. To maintain the co-researchers' wellbeing, I deemed it necessary to cultivate a trusting, transparent and open relationship from the start (Rossman & Rallis, 2017; Tracy, 2020). This was ensured by being honest concerning the purpose of the study, my expectations of them during the study, and that participation was voluntary. Furthermore, I discussed the perceived benefits and potential risks involved in the study as well as the risks and benefits of collecting data remotely. It was made clear to co-researchers that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any given time and that they were under no obligation to participate in any or all of the data collection methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Information was provided in a language that the women fully comprehended. Once I was convinced that the women were completely apprised of their rights and wholly comprehended the nature of the study, they were asked to indicate their willingness to participate in the research and

signed the consent form (see Appendix B). Informed consent stipulates that co-researchers are free from coercion and that they fully comprehend the potential risks and benefits of their participation. Each co-researcher was given a copy of the consent form, which contained the contact details of the therapist whom they were encouraged to contact if, and when, they deemed it necessary. Owing to the sensitive nature of the study and the understanding that qualitative research is ever-changing and subjective by nature, maintaining informed consent was an ongoing process (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Community-based action research requires that the researcher shows the utmost respect for the research community and community members. Therefore, I strove to create 'a reciprocal learning culture' during the study (Wilson et al., 2018, p. 195). This showed to improve communication and understanding between the researcher and co-researchers, as well as solidifying respect for the values and interests of all parties concerned. Hence, by treating all women and community members with respect and dignity and ensuring that extra precautions were taken not to violate their privacy, autonomy, and confidentiality, harm could be minimised. Throughout the research process, I remained mindful of the principle of non-maleficence, which purports the notion of avoiding harm or any negative influence for the women who were involved. Harm was further kept to a minimum by avoiding deductive disclosure of the women's details (Allan, 2008; Tracy, 2020). Protecting the identity of research participants as well as the anonymity of data is one of the cornerstones of sound and ethical research (Patton, 2015). Confidentiality and anonymity were assured as follows:

- Pseudonyms were used in place of their real names and caution was taken to exclude all identifying details. A conscious effort was made not to define any characteristics that could be used to define co-researchers.
- Confidentiality during remote data collection via WhatsApp posed a problem and consequently, co-researchers were encouraged to prioritise privacy by using a set of earphones (Greenbaum, 2020).
- Co-researchers were informed of their right, on written request, to gain access to the transcripts and the final copy of the research analysis and findings (see Appendix B).
- Hard copy data was photographed and uploaded into the encrypted storage device and the virtual cloud. The password-encrypted USB drive is kept secure in a locked cabinet. Owing to the sensitive nature of the phenomenon under study, measures were taken to safeguard data against unlawful access and will be kept for ten years after the completion of the research study.

3.10.2 Situational ethics

Second, ethical issues that arise in specific contexts or communities, known as situational ethics, required ongoing consideration as my main aim was to encapsulate the voices of the marginalised and voiceless. Reflection, critical friends, and constant questioning of my own ethical considerations proved vital.

The Covid-19 pandemic was one of the major unforeseen obstacles that needed to be mitigated. It had a profound effect on data collection and various new ethical matters needed to be considered. Owing to social distancing and keeping with the *ethic of care* perspective, all face-to-face interactions were placed on hold. For the research to continue, I decided to collect data virtually (Clay, 2020; Greenbaum, 2020). I, therefore, needed to include innovative ways of ensuring that ethically sound research occurred in the era of Covid-19 remote data collection. WhatsApp was chosen to collect data remotely owing to its popularity with South African users and its easy-to-use interface (Barbosa & Milan, 2019). I ensured co-researchers' competence using WhatsApp as a platform for remote data collection by providing them with instructions on the usage as well as the risks and benefits thereof. WhatsApp messages and calls (including chats, group chats, images, videos, voice messages, voice calls, video calls and files) have always-on end-to-end encryption, which ensures that only the people communicating with each other have access to the data, not even WhatsApp. End-to-end encryption ensures that the encryption and decryption of messages and calls occurred entirely on the devices of the researcher and co-researchers. Additionally, each message and call has its own verification security code, which ensures privacy for users. It was agreed upon that during the Covid-19 pandemic WhatsApp was the most effective and safest way to collect data remotely from the research community (WhatsApp, 2017; Barbosa & Milan, 2019; Greenbaum, 2020; WhatsApp, 2020).

During this study, situations arose that required the implementation of situational ethics. The question that Rossman and Rallis (2017, p. 148) posed, 'What does *this* participant need in *this* moment?' guided me in my decision-making process. To me, this question emanates from the *ethic of care* perspective which holds the co-researchers' wellbeing as the central theme. Tracy (2020, p. 285) further stated that 'ethical obligations are complex' and that ethical researchers need to 'vigilantly consider the impact of their practices *throughout* the inquiry'.

3.10.3 Relational ethics

Lastly, relational ethics recognises the interconnectedness of the researcher and the researched. As a researcher, I realised that my thoughts and actions had a profound effect on my research. Literature suggests that the researcher be aware of their own role and impact on the nature of the study.

Participatory research calls for research to stem from collaboration; hence, my own role and impact could not be ignored. According to Kusago and Miyamoto (2014, p. 281), the researcher and co-researchers are on a path of 'mutual discovery' within participatory action research. Working within a marginalised community required me to take extra care to respect the private lives and autonomy of my research group (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Wilson et al., 2018). The highest regard was therefore placed on ensuring that the women's dignity, autonomy, and welfare were maintained through a process of mutual respect, disclosure, and member-checking (Babbie & Mouton, 2013; Tracy, 2020). It was further imperative to respect their autonomy of participation in the study, especially when it came to their choice in divulging sensitive information, and that refusing to do so would not affect their access to subsequent care (Barrow et al., 2021). Additionally, I continually made the co-researchers aware of their right to make use of the external psychologist to ensure that harm was limited. I took the utmost care to protect their identities and to maintain confidentiality by continually seeking informed consent (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Owing to the disclosure of sensitive information between the co-researchers and the primary researcher, potential issues regarding intrusion and confidentiality were likely to occur (Dodson et al., 2007). Wood and Zuber-Skerritt (2013), and Bigelow et al. (2019) thus recommend open and collaborative communication that leads to reflection and equal participation. I, therefore, ensured that I continually reflected my thoughts, feelings, and ideas to the co-researchers throughout the process of data generation and analysis. Examples of my own reflective journal can be seen in Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

Furthermore, sensitivity regarding power relations between the stakeholders is a vital component of participatory action research (Minkler, 2004). It was therefore imperative to create 'dialogical spaces where power relations can be minimised through the development of trusting relationships, critical reflection on ongoing interaction and recognition of all levels and forms of learning and development' (Wood, 2019, p. 5). Wood (2019) further elaborates that to ensure an equal playing field regarding the power dynamic, the researcher is required to restore co-researchers' worthiness by emphasising their 'silenced voices' in the hope that it will lead to skills development (p. 2).

Owing to the sensitive nature of the study, I was extremely mindful to conduct the research in an ethically sound manner. In addition to the above-mentioned ethical considerations, I am continually bound by the Health Professionals Council of South Africa's ethical codes for psychologists as well as the ethical codes stipulated by the University of Stellenbosch. These ethical codes, together with the data validation techniques, served as a framework to ensure that the study was conducted with integrity and trustworthiness.

3.11 Conclusion

The objective of this chapter was to provide an overall explanation of the research design and methodology that informed the research for this study. The research design was described and the reason for the inclusion of specific data generation strategies was explained. Additionally, the methods of data analysis were described. The chapter was concluded by explaining how data validation was ensured as well as the ethical principles that were adhered to during the study. In the next chapter, data analysis, categories, and findings from the research study will be presented and discussed.

Chapter 4: Discussion of Findings

'Everyone has a story. Share your story with me, so I can prepare myself for the future.'

(Shandre, p. 8 and 9)

4.1 Introduction

This study aimed to explore **with** the group of women ways in which they had navigated becoming mothers during their adolescence and how this experience may have impacted their identity formation and life choices. Throughout the research process, I made every effort to remain authentic and respectful towards the collaborators, mindful of the importance of gaining an insider perspective and creating the research space as a place that honours the voices of the women. This chapter presents the findings of the study guided by the frequently occurring themes and subthemes that related to the research question as they emerged from the data analysis. This thesis explored the lived realities of the co-researchers' experiences of early motherhood as guided by the key research question: **What influence did becoming a mother during adolescence have on the identity formation of a group of women in a marginalised community?**

Community-based participatory action research (CBPAR) was used as the research design to gain insight into this phenomenon (see sections 1.8.5.2, 1.8.5.3, and 3.6.1.1 for more information). CBPAR engages the community in addressing social issues. To facilitate the collaboration process, the following subsidiary questions were used to guide the study towards answering the key research question:

- **How do the women view themselves?**
- **How did early motherhood influence their identity formation?**
- **Which intrinsic and extrinsic variables have assisted or hindered them in navigating their lives?**

In addition, Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory was utilised as a theoretical framework in the study (see section 2.2). This was used in conjunction with positive psychology and resilience theory (see section 2.4). Positive psychology considers and seeks to focus on thriving through adversity. In exploring the notion of resilience, I sought to work with this group of often marginalised women in terms of how they constructed their identities whilst, at the same time, fostering resilience in the face of adversity.

4.2 The Co-researchers

Co-researchers were purposefully selected because I believed that they would provide rich data and challenge me to engage in reflective ways. Access to this research community was gained with the help of a key informant, who is an active member of a women empowerment initiative in the community (for more information regarding her role, see sections 1.7, 1.8.4, 3.6.2.2, and 3.7). The key informant played a vital role in recruiting co-researchers using the following inclusion criteria:

- Women, older than 18 years of age, who had become pregnant during their adolescence
- They had to already have left the education system at the time of the research
- Women residing within the Ukomelela community

Initially, a group of eight women showed an interest in the study, but during the semi-structured online individual interviews, two of the women disclosed that they had become pregnant in their early 20s and were therefore excluded from the study (see section 3.6.2.2). Subsequently, a total of six women participated in the final research study. The women who participated are members of a peri-urban community in the Western Cape, South Africa. Ukomelela is a high-risk community plagued with various social issues, such as drug and alcohol abuse, gangsterism, crime, unemployment, single motherhood, and teenage pregnancy (Ludidi, 2019; Siketsha, 2019; Siketsha, 2020). This marginalised community is located near scenic mountains and various tourist attractions. Most people driving in the area do not even take note of Ukomelela. Within a five-kilometre radius are some of the wealthiest communities in the Western Cape and sought-after private schools. The contrast is shocking, as I noted in my journal:

Reflective Journal, 27 October 2020

Today I drove to drop off the supplies at the key informant's home. On my way there I was shocked by the utter contrast with regard to the living conditions of Ukomelela and the neighbouring community. As you drive, you pass massive estates and renowned private schools. As I parked my car in Ukomelela, and was greeted by Kiah, it made me wonder how this distinction mentally affects the community I am doing my research in.

To ensure continued ethical conduct, all identifying information was replaced by a pseudonym to protect the co-researchers' right to anonymity (see sections 1.10, and 3.10.1). This is a small community and some of the women participating in this study are well known in their community; therefore, this was an attempt to minimise the risk of compromising the anonymity of the co-researchers and the confidentiality of the data. In consultation with the co-researchers, we agreed that a brief introduction of each of the

women would afford the reader a glimpse into the realities that each of the women face. In addition, we hoped that this introduction would frame the discussion of the themes.

In Table 4.1 I provide a brief overview of who the women are and immediately after that a brief introduction of each of them.

Table 4.1: Summary of the Co-researchers in this Study

Pseudonym	Current Age	Spoken Language	Age of 1 st pregnancy	Number of children currently	Finished Matric	Employment
Kiah	36	English and Afrikaans	17	2	No	Unemployed
Rushay	28	isiXhosa and English	16	4	No	Employed part-time
Andrea	33	Afrikaans	19	4	No	Unemployed
Jeslyn	27	Afrikaans	18	2 (and pregnant with 3 rd)	No	Unemployed
Shandre	24	Afrikaans	19	1	No	Unemployed
Wanda	26	Afrikaans	17	3	No	Unemployed

Kiah grew up with her mother and grandmother. She was born in Ukomelela but moved around extensively as a young child. According to Kiah, she dropped out of school in Gr 11 as she was pregnant at the time. She shared that early motherhood was not unusual to her as both her mother and grandmother had become pregnant at the age of 17. Kiah is currently 36 years old and is a single parent to two teenage children.

Rushay grew up in the Eastern Cape with her elderly grandmother. Owing to the fragility of her caretaker, Rushay had to help around the house on a permanent basis. Her grandmother was extremely strict and, according to her, tried to instil good morals and values in her grandchild. At the age of 15, Rushay moved to the Western Cape to live with her parents. She shared that she experienced a great many challenges in adapting to her unfamiliar environment; key among these was her inability to speak Afrikaans. Afrikaans was the dominant language in the community at that time. According to Rushay, she also often felt like an outsider because she was bi-racial. Her mother is of coloured descent, and her father is isiXhosa. Her family decided that since Rushay could speak isiXhosa, she should move to live with her aunt in Nomkazi (another community). She first became pregnant at the age of 16 and currently, at 28, she is the mother of four children.

Andrea, who is currently 33 years old, grew up in Ukomelela and described her childhood as carefree. Her family at the time consisted of her mother, grandmother, and brother. Both Andrea and her mom had their first child at the age of 19. Andrea is currently a single parent to four children.

Jeslyn, who is currently 27 years old, lived with both her parents and two brothers in Ukomelela. According to Jeslyn, she witnessed a great deal of violence in her home. Her mom became pregnant at the age of 23 for the first time, and Jeslyn had her first child at 18. She has two children and is currently pregnant with a third child by her boyfriend.

Shandre, currently 24 years old, initially grew up in the Northern Cape with extended family members. At the age of 12, she relocated to Ukomelela to live with her biological mother. Shandre had her first and only child at the age of 19. Her mother gave birth to her first child at the age of 16.

Wanda was raised on a farm by extended family members. In Grade 5 she moved to Ukomelela to live with her parents. She cannot recall the exact age at which her mother had her first child but stated that it was 'very young'. Wanda, who is currently 26, gave birth to her first child at the age of 17. She is presently a single mom of three.

4.3 Procedure of the Study

The study used a community-based participatory action research design, focusing on creating a space that sought to enable co-researchers to gain self-confidence in their ability to communicate their lived realities by using creative arts-based techniques. According to Palus and McGuire (2015), this collaborative communication 'can prosper with the use of interesting, tangible, and aesthetically grounded [visual artefacts]' (p. 692). Thus, encouraging the voice of co-researchers to be heard, allowed me to gain insight into their experiences to create opportunities for reflection and meaning-making. Refer to Sections 1.8.5 and 3.7 to see how we used these creative arts-based methods in sessions. In Figure 4.1 are samples of the creative arts-based artefacts of the co-researchers:

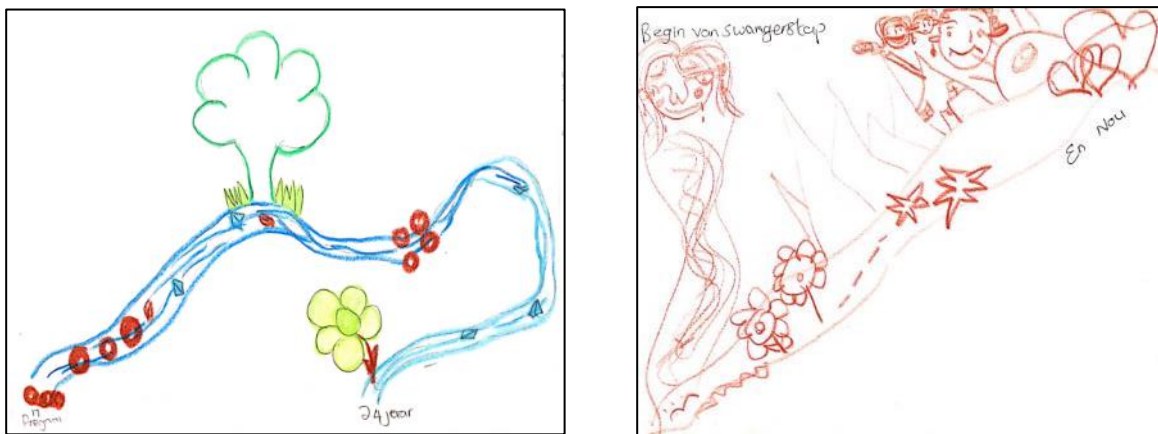


Figure 4.1 Examples of creative arts-based activities (River of Life)

The use of verbal and non-verbal techniques opened avenues for communication within the group and played a vital role in increasing the co-researchers' self-awareness and autonomy. Shared ownership was encouraged by affording everyone the space to express their views, thus encouraging each co-researcher's voice. These vibrant discussions often influenced the social dynamics within the group. I reflected regularly on the process as it unfolded:

Reflective Journal, 14 November 2020

The women displayed immense care for one another and respected the space and voices of each other. I assume that this is due to their own notions of sometimes not feeling heard, that they afford each other this basic human courtesy.

Rich data were collected in a collaborative process. A private space away from the co-researchers' own homes was negotiated with the key informant (see section 3.7). The key informant is well-known in the community and familiar with research activities. In addition, the co-researchers knew the key informant well and knew that she had previous experience of working in research projects. I also consulted with each of the co-researchers to ensure that they felt comfortable in the negotiated space and they were assured that their confidentiality was respected. Data generation was undertaken using creative arts-based techniques within the individual semi-structured interviews and two focus group discussions. In Figure 4.2, there are examples of clay models that the co-researchers and I used to facilitate the process of discussions in the first focus group:



Figure 4.2 Examples of creative arts-based activities (Clay)

It was an enriching experience for me, for the key informant and for the co-researchers as we were challenged to engage in new and often unique data generation processes during the Covid-19 pandemic. The virtual space, however, caused some technical difficulties and this often resulted in my requesting the women to repeat themselves. The video quality was further not of a decent quality and worsened the sluggish internet connection. Pictures were subsequently taken in the moment and shared by the key informant via WhatsApp. This ensured real-time engagement with and discussions around the creative artefacts and 'in this way, greater clarity can be realized by individual members as well as the group as a whole' (Palus & McGuire, 2015, p. 692). The women in the study were extremely mindful not to talk over each other in the virtual space and this ensured clear and open communication. The ethical challenges and the emergent power dynamics as the process unfolded are aritcal parts of this community-based participatory action research (see sections 3.9.3 and 3.10.3). Below I share an extract from my reflective journal to illustrate my observations:

Reflective Journal, 14 November 2020

During the focus group discussions, it was evident that some of the co-researchers were more outspoken than others. Their different personalities started shining through. It was important to make sure that the diverse voices and lived experienced were apparent in the research. Thus, I often needed to call on certain women and ask for their specific opinions regarding a matter.

Owing to the nature of data collection, substantial quantities of data sets were generated. It was therefore important that I only used relevant sections of text as they applied to my research topic and subsequent categories, themes and subthemes. These sections of texts, which were allocated a priori codes as themes emerged from the data (Lapadat, 2010), are discussed in the next sub-section. In all the extracts found in this study, the co-researchers' words are presented verbatim to indicate their own voices. It is important to note that some of the quotations are lengthy. These were deliberately included to honour the voices of the women in the study and to further ensure that I respect the complexity of the subject matter. Some of the extracts are placed in Afrikaans, followed by the English translation in brackets. This was done to ensure that the women's voices are central to the conversation. Furthermore, quotations were inserted by referring to the pseudonyms of the co-researchers (see Table 4.1). If a quote was taken from an individual interview, the letter 'I' will be included, as well as the page number and line from where the quote started, according to the transcripts (for example, I: Kiah, p. 13, line 42). Additionally, if a quote was taken from one of the focus group discussions the letters 'FG' will be included, as well as the page number and line where the quote started according to the transcripts (for example, FG: Kiah, p. 13 line 12). After the main themes were identified, the co-researchers and I verified each theme to ensure conformability and respect for the women's voices.

4.4 An Exploration of the Co-Researchers' Voices and Meaning-Making Experiences

In this section, I will provide authenticated descriptions through the voices of these women and elaborate on how they relate to addressing the primary and secondary research questions. After collaborative discussions with the co-researchers, the main themes and subthemes were agreed upon. The themes and subthemes reflect the voices, perceptions, lived realities, and meaning-making processes of the co-researchers' experience of early motherhood, identity, community factors, and resilience. The categories, themes, and subthemes are summarised in Figure 4.3 and a discussion of this analysis follows.

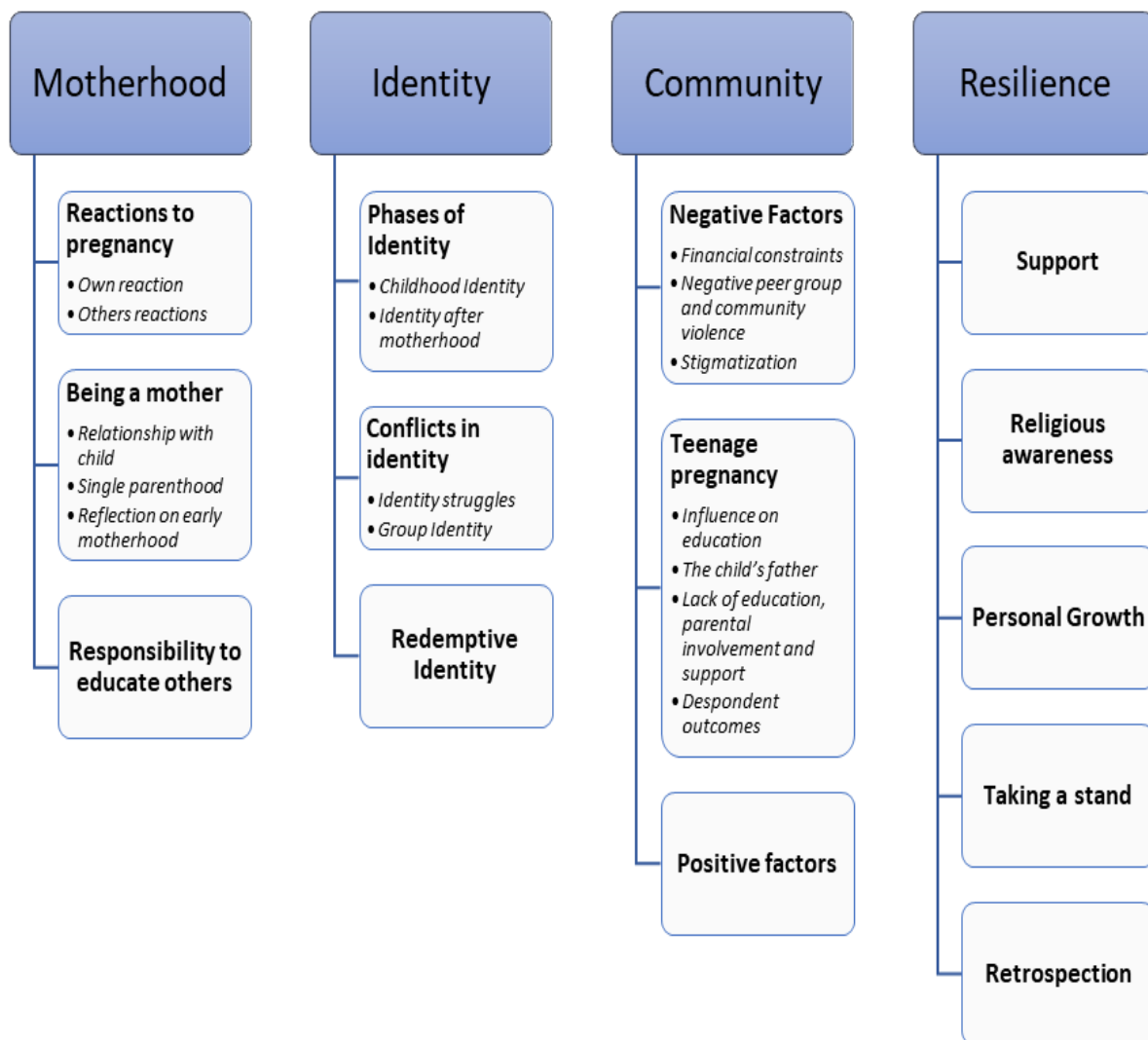


Figure 4.3 Categories, Themes and Subthemes (Source: Author)

The following section of this chapter will go into greater depth with regard to the categories, themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data analysis.

4.4.1 Motherhood

The word 'mother' often evokes a heterosexual, middle-class, ideological image of a primary caregiver with expert knowledge, who has enough time and resources to provide extensively for her children and husband. This picture is, however, fraught with idyllic perceptions of motherhood, which very few families possess. (Coontz, 2016; Taylor & Bloch, 2018). In talking together during our individual and focus group discussions, I realised that the topic of motherhood embraced a range of features for the co-researchers.

These women became mothers during their teenage years, which added to the complexity of the situation. In this category, I present and discuss the themes related to motherhood in greater detail. First, the women experienced various reactions to their pregnancy, both intrinsically and from external sources. Second, the theme of what it means to be a mother is explored, with specific reference to their relationship with the child, being a single parent, as well as their reflections on their journeys. Lastly, the women in the study felt compelled to share their knowledge of motherhood by educating others, including their children and the broader community. The following figure displays the themes and subthemes for this category:

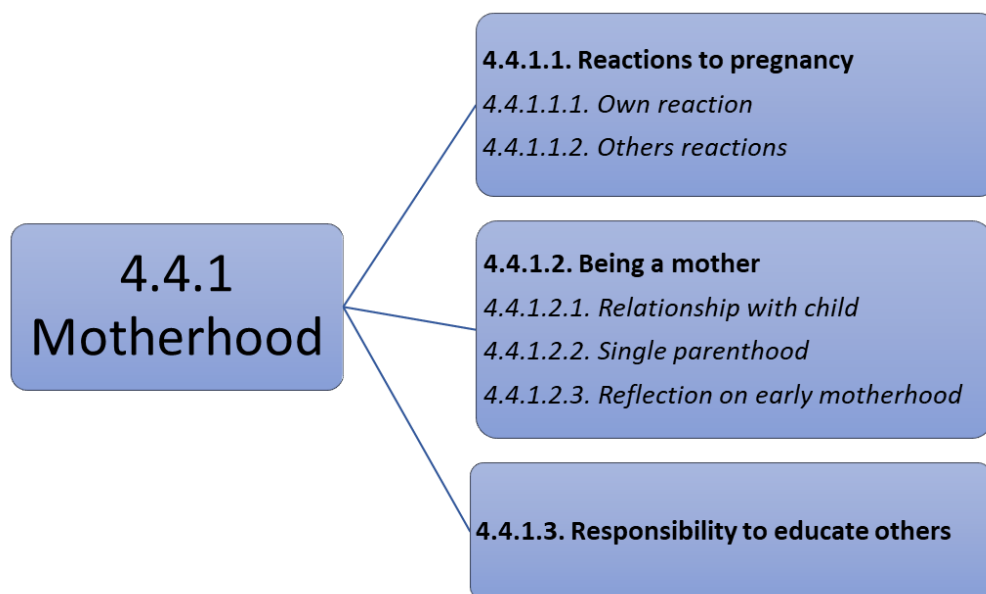


Figure 4.4 Category One: Motherhood (Source: Author)

4.4.1.1 Reactions to pregnancy

As adolescents, we become more aware of our surroundings as well people's reactions to our behaviour (Kim et al., 2019). If we throw early motherhood into this mix, numerous reactions can be expected from friends, family, the community we reside in, as well as from ourselves. As the women in the study explored their lived realities of early motherhood, we engaged with the various reactions to the news of a new child entering the family unit.

4.4.1.1.1 Own reaction to pregnancy.

In their narratives, all the women shared the mixed emotions they felt when they heard that they were expecting their first child in their teenage years. They cited various emotions and reactions when finding out that they were pregnant. So, for instance, one shared her initial shock and the fear she experienced at the thought of having to tell her father about her pregnancy. She shared that the thoughts that flashed through her mind included, 'Hoe gaan ek my pa vertel? Ek gaan nie huis toe nie' (How will I tell my father? I cannot go home. I: Jeslyn, p. 4, line 41). And just like Jeslyn, many of the young women disclosed that their initial reactions to their unplanned pregnancy were to try to keep it a



Figure 4.5 Extract from Jeslyn's collage (Source: Author)

secret for as long as possible. Many of them expressed feelings of anxiety and thoughts which included more permanent solutions to the issue at hand. The feelings and emotions about how to navigate this experience of unplanned pregnancy were complex and overwhelming, resulting in feelings of isolation and desperation. This resulted in their being conflicted about whether to resort to abortion. Shandre revealed:

'Ek het gevoel asof my lewe tot 'n einde gekom het, want hoe gaan ek vir 'n kind kan voorsien in hierdie omstandighede wat ek nou is? [...] Ek het die lewe altyd gesien as 'n wrede plek om in te bly en ek het nooit dit begeer vir my om 'n kind te het, om 'n kind voort te bring in so 'n tipe lewe nie. So ek het gevoel maar die kind kan ek nie hou nie, want ek is nie gereed om 'n ma te wees nie. Ek het al klomp dinge probeer doen om ontslae te raak van die kind, maar niks het gebeur nie. Die kind het gebly sit. Ek het gesukkel, vreeslik gesukkel.' (I felt as if my life had ended, because how am I going to provide for my child in the circumstances that I am now in? [...] I always saw life as a cruel place to live in, and I never wanted that for my child, to bring a child into that type of life. So I felt that I couldn't keep the child, because I am not ready to be a mother. I tried a lot of things to get rid of the child, but nothing worked. The child stayed. I struggled, I struggled a lot. I: Shandre, p. 3, line: 17).

Another co-researcher, Wanda, shared similar feelings and thoughts. According to her, when she found out she was pregnant, she was extremely shocked and at the time thought that an abortion seemed like the only way out for her. However, it was too late:

'Ek wil die kind afgemaak het, maar dit was te laat, want ek was klaar vier maande.' (I wanted to abort the child, but it was too late, I was already four months. I: Wanda, p. 4, line: 24).

The views shared above introduce us to the complex nature of contributing factors that clouded the reality of the situation in which they found themselves. This reality of bringing children into a world filled with health, emotional, financial, familial, and various other challenges became all too real. On top of this, the women often felt rejected and isolated. Shandre recalled some of the lived reality of becoming a teenage mother at seventeen:

'Die emotions wat deur my mind gegaan het was, ek bly in 'n tweevertrekhok. My ma stel glad nie belang in my nie.' (The emotions that ran through my mind was, I live in a two-room shack. My mom isn't interested in me. I: Shandre, p. 3, line 47).

She, and many of the other co-researchers, felt overwhelmed by the dire circumstances around them and they were distressed at the thought of bringing another human being into such a devastating reality.

The women shared an increased perception that they not only had to cope with the reality of being a new mother but that they also had to navigate the physical and emotional rollercoaster that accompanies pregnancy. Shandre expressed that she struggled to cope with the changes to her physical appearance as well as her mental well-being. This often led to resentment towards her unborn baby as her physical appearance changed and impacted her sense of self:

'Jy voel moody, jy is emotional. Jy ervaar dit differently. Baie mense is lieflik en hulle glow. Ek het kolle gehet in my gesig en die mense het elke dag vir my gesê, ons sien jou gesig lyk lelik. My neus het net so dik gestaan. Ek was kwaad vir die kind ook omdat hy my gesig so gespoil het.' (You feel moody, you are emotional. You experience everything differently. Many people are lovely, they glow. I had bumps on my face and people used to tell me on a daily basis that my face looked ugly. My nose was thick. I was angry at the child because he spoilt my face. I: Shandre, p. 7, line: 16).

Several co-researchers shared that they, as young women, were often conflicted with physical changes that challenged their sense of self and the pride that occasionally accompanied the young teenage mother's experience. Jeslyn spoke of how she was proud of her physical changes and wanted to show it off but was not proud of being pregnant:

'Ek wou net my lyf uitwys. Die swangerskap maak jou mos baie mooi. [...] Ek was nie trots op my swangerskap nie, maar ek was trots oor hoe my lyf gelyk het.' (I just wanted to show off my body. The pregnancy makes you pretty. [...] I wasn't proud of my pregnancy, but I was proud of the way my body looked. I: Jeslyn, p. 6, line 37).

As their journey in this study progressed, it emerged that for all the co-researchers, finding out about their unplanned pregnancies dramatically changed the trajectory of their life stories. Their path was a shared one with commonalities along the route. Their increased perception of pregnancy was indicative of adversities, rejection, and isolation. The women shared that becoming pregnant during their teenage years often meant that they remained dependent on their parents or family for socio-economic support (see section 4.4.3.1.1). As they were residing with their caregivers, the changes to their physical appearance would become evident. Therefore, they were not able to keep their unborn child a secret and were obligated to tell their partners, caregivers, and friends.

4.4.1.1.2 *Other's reaction to pregnancy.*

Following Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory, individuals do not function in isolation but within a familial and societal system (Yakubu & Salisu, 2018). All the women who participated in this study shared the view that disclosing their pregnancies to their loved ones was extremely difficult and that it often resulted in increased feelings of anxiety, isolation, and rejection.

The women recalled that fear of the disappointment, and sometimes anger of the immediate caregivers of pregnant teenagers, were common responses in their community and, in an effort to shield themselves from this, they tried to hide their changing physical appearance. Their attempts at hiding the pregnancy were often in vain, as Rushay stated,

'my aunt noticed that I was pregnant. Maybe she see some signs on my body and she asked me like, why is your - why are you moody?' (I: Rushay, p. 2, line: 15).

According to Rushay, before she had the opportunity to share the news of her pregnancy with her mother, her aunt had already disclosed it. She said her mother reacted in utter disappointment:

'My mom was seriously, I don't want to lie, she was broken. She was, yoh, I don't know, she was very, very broken. She was like, she even cried the time she found out I was pregnant. So for her, it was painful.' (I: Rushay, p. 7, line 10).

As with Rushay, Jeslyn's aunt also first noticed the pregnancy, even when she herself was still in denial. The women voiced that since they were all still teenagers, and not yet comfortable in their developing bodies, the signs of pregnancy were often missed, but picked up by older women. In addition, the prospect

of what was to come after one breaks the news to family was an extremely fearful thought for the women. They often had no one to turn to and no one to comfort them. For Shandre, as with many of the women in the study, life seemed like a lonely place after they heard the news of her pregnancy. She voiced this emotion by stating:

'My ma-hulle verstoot my. Hulle verwyd my. Ek het nou nie ander heenkome nie. [...] Haar reaksie was, my klere gepak, in 'n sak gesit, gegooi, voor die deur gesit. Vir my uitgestoot en haar deur toegemaak. Sy het nie gepraat nie. Dit was silence. Dit was 'n reënerige dag. Ek sit nou met 'n sak. Waarnatoe gaan ek nou?' (My mom pushed me away. They resented me. I don't have anywhere else to go. Her reaction was, she packed my clothes, threw them in a bag, and put it in front of the door. She pushed me out and closed the door. She didn't talk. It was silence. It was a rainy day. I am sitting with a bag. Where do I go? I: Shandre, p. 4, line 10; p. 12, line 34).

The view shared in the group was one where they were often left to their own devices after the caregivers found out about their pregnancy. In Shandre's situation, she was alone. Her mother abandoned her at her most vulnerable point. For the women in the study, this feeling of isolation was a common one. Suddenly, according to the co-researchers, they felt as if they had little control over their own destinies and little agency in their own lives. The women agreed that the disappointment often expressed by family members can, they believe, be attributed to the fact that they had lofty expectations of the success they wanted their daughters to attain. As Kiah reflected,

'She [my mother] was very disappointed, because she wanted me to finish my school and stuff.'
(I: Kiah, p. 3, line 10).

Unfortunately, many of the women shared that their family members' ways of expressing their disappointment, or aspirations, often lacked empathy. In this regard, I often used the Rogerian principles of congruence, unconditional positive regard and, of course, empathy during the discussions. They felt that family members often pressured them into measures with which they were not comfortable, or which do not align with their values. Kiah's mother, for example, suggested that she opt for an abortion as a way out of her predicament:

'So for her, she said that I must go and have an abortion and stuff like that. But I didn't feel good about abortion stuff because I was scared. For me it was like, I'm going to die if I do an abortion. And then I told her, I don't feel comfortable with this abortion. So ja, it was very hard for me.' (I: Kiah, p. 3, line 12).

When having to decide who to disclose their pregnancy to, most of the women shared that they felt more comfortable disclosing their pregnancy to their mothers. However, both Wanda and Jeslyn said that for

them, they needed to share the news of their pregnancy with their fathers, as their mothers had passed away. Wanda's father did not react in the way she had hoped, and she was left feeling even more alone.

'Hy [my pa] het my uit die huis uitgesit.' (He threw me out of the house. I: Wanda, p. 3, line 37).

In his disbelief and disappointment at the news, she feels her father reacted in the only way he knew how at that point in time, and that was to make her fend for herself. Jeslyn's father, in contrast, reacted indifferently to the news of his daughter's pregnancy at eighteen:

'En sy [ma] was nou nie daar om dit vir haar te sê nie. So ek moes dit aan my pa uitlap, want my pa is mos toe ma en pa vir my. Jou kind is swanger. En al wat hy kon gesê het, wat kan hy nou maak?' (And she [mom] was not there to tell. So I had to tell my dad, because my dad was now mom and dad to me. Your child is pregnant. And all that he could say was, what can he now do? I: Jeslyn, p. 4, line 18).

Indifference is often common when parents do not know how to express their emotions to the news of an early pregnancy. Andrea shared her family's reaction of indifference during our conversation and reflected on their reaction. She shared that she was baffled by their response. According to Andrea, she was left feeling like she wasn't worth the effort of caring:

'Dit was nie ein'lik 'n groot ding gewees nie. Wat ek nie vandag kan verstaan nie, maar hoekom het niemand rêrig geworry nie.' (It wasn't a big deal. I don't understand this today, but why did no one really worry? I: Andrea, p. 3, line 21).

The fact that some parents reacted indifferently, exacerbated the women's feelings of rejection by the ones they thought cared the most for them. The co-researchers further depicted lived experiences that were saturated in isolation and a lack of agency. Within their own families, they were excluded and othered. Additionally, within the community context, the young women also experienced a multitude of reactions to their pregnancy. Kiah described her situation at school as one in which,

'they would gossip about me in class, the teachers and the other learners in class. Oh, she's pregnant and she's doing this and that. And the man left her, the boy had left her and, and, and.' (I: Kiah, p. 4, line 11).

In Wanda's reflection, she shared that she had experienced a range of opinions from her social group:

'Party was baie kwaad vir my. Party het gelike wat ek moet swanger gewees het, hulle het vir my gelike. En party was nie soos 'n mens moet wees nie. Hulle was baie afjakkerig en so.' (Some were very mad at me. Some liked me because I was pregnant. And some were not like a person should be. They were jealous and so. I: Wanda, p. 8, line 32).

Moreover, Rushay's peer group were curious about her pregnancy, as many of them had not yet had sexual encounters with boys. Therefore, amongst her friends, she was seen as a source of information:

'Yoh, they [friends] were shocked. They said, yoh, how did it happen? I told them, like some of them they were still virgins. They didn't have sex yet. And then they were curious like, yoh, when did you have sex? How was it and all those kind of stuff. I said for me like, I think I just, I was having sex maybe three times, four times when I get pregnant. So ja, it wasn't like something, ja. So how was it, sissy and all this stuff. So what are you going to do now? I said, I'm going to get the baby. What must I do?' (I: Rushay, p. 8, line 17).

Family and friends of the women were not the only ones who shared their opinions about the unplanned pregnancy. According to the co-researchers, the families of the father of the unborn child also proclaimed judgement on the teenage mothers. Some of the fathers' families' responses include but were not limited to resorting to denial of the responsibility that their sons had in the pregnancy and often blamed the women for the unplanned pregnancy. Shandre experienced this first-hand:

'En die kind se pa se mense het toe gekom. Hulle het vir my gesê, maar dit is nie hulle kind nie.'
(And the child's dad's family came. They said that it isn't his child. I: Shandre, p. 3, line 2).

The co-researchers were not only rejected by their own families, but even by people who hardly knew them.

From the extracts above, it is evident that the women in this study received mixed reactions, opinions, and judgements on the news of their pregnancy. The impact of others' opinions on something so personal has, according to them, had everlasting effects on their identity and self-understanding. As in other research done with teenage women, these views are often internalised and became part of the narrative with which one sees certain events within one's life trajectory. Transitioning into motherhood and adapting to a new role was difficult for the co-researchers.

4.4.1.2 Being a mother

While we were collaboratively exploring the phenomenon under study, the women spoke often of the idea of being a mother and what it entailed for them. Various subthemes emerged including their relationships with their children and how this evolved over time and the influence that single parenthood has had on their lives. All of these subthemes culminated in the women actively reflecting on their lived experiences.

4.4.1.2.1 Relationship with child.

After the birth of their first child, many of the co-researchers shared that they were in a state of ignorant bliss as their emotions were heightened. According to many of the women, they experienced excitement

about being pregnant as they progressed in their pregnancy. Motherhood was the unknown about which many had romantic expectations: about being a mother and about how their relationship with their child might be. However, for many of the women, these feelings soon disappeared with the arrival of the newborn, as Kiah so aptly describes:

'Ek wens ek het nie met daai kind se pa gepraat nie, wens ek was nog 'n virgin, wens ek het weggehardloop vir die outjies. En as jy so voel, dan kan jy nie vir jou kind liefde gee nie. Dis hoekom ek vir child abuse daar het. Want daai blessing is nou nie meer 'n blessing nie. Daai blessing is nou 'n curse. Dis 'n vloek wat op jou gesit is, daai kind. Daai kind het gekom en daai kind het jou lewe net omgedop en gekrap' (I wish I had never spoken to that child's father, wish I was still a virgin, wish I ran away from the boys. And if you feel like that you can't give your child love. That is why I abused the child. Because that blessing is no longer a blessing. That blessing is now a curse. That child came and that child messed up your life. FG: Kiah, p. 35, line 12).

Many of the women expressed mixed emotions with regard to the arrival of their child and how the initial feelings of despair made way for an awareness of their realities of providing for their children. As the primary researcher, it was remarkable to notice the growth of the co-researchers and how their relationships with their children blossomed over time, as I reflected in my journal:

Reflective Journal, 28 November 2020

Early motherhood was a time of utter despair for the women in the study. Reading their transcripts makes me realise the growth they have achieved by establishing themselves as mothers and caregivers. The women often embraced this role with little knowledge and very few support structures, yet the relationship between them and their children has grown into something, I assume, they wish they had experienced as kids.

After having taken time for the dust to settle, the women started seeing their children as blessings,

'Dit was my grootste geskenk in die lewe in. Ek was baie dankbaar'. (It was my greatest gift in life. I was thankful. FG: Shandre, p. 27, line 11)

Becoming a mother enabled the women to gain maturity and a feeling of wanting to be better humans for their own children:

'Ek het probeer om 'n beter mens te wees vir my kind en ek was dankbaar vir hom, want hy was my – hy het my gecomfort most of the time. As ek vir hom gesien het, het hy my hoop gegee om beter te kan doen in die lewe' (I tried to be a better person for my child, I was thankful for him,

because he was my – he comforted me most of the time. When I saw him, he gave me hope to do better in life. FG: Shandre, p. 8, line 34).

This was also evident in Shandre's clay model, where she depicted her symbolic journey of hope:



Figure 4.6 Shandre's clay model (Source: Author)

According to societal standards, there is an intrinsic bond between mother and child. However, according to some, the bond between mother and child was not always present from the beginning and it often required the mother to work at it and trust that the connection would evolve over time. Jeslyn shared that for her,

'[Ek het] geleer om my kind lief te hê en te aanvaar as my kind en as my kind alleen. En my desire is om ten alle tye my kind lief te hê. Tyd te maak vir my kind en so aan en aandag, respek.'
(I learnt to love and accept my child, and as my child alone. And my desire is to love my child at all times. Make time for my child and so forth, attention and respect. FG: Jeslyn, p. 33, line 41).

As they reflected on the challenges related to the relationship of mother and child, all of the women were particularly grateful for the remarkable bond they had with their children. As this bond strengthened, they were thankful about their choices as young women:

'Weet jy, nè, daai kind is so amazing [...] En like, ek wil die kind abort het. Waar sal ek nou 'n suster gehad het soos sy' (Do you know, that child is so amazing [...] And like, I wanted to abort the child. Where would I now have had a sister like her. FG: Kiah, p. 29, line 13).

For these young mothers, having this unplanned experience afforded them an opportunity to foster a new family bond with their own children. For many, it allowed them to create a family bond which they had not

experienced themselves when growing up. They also shared a sense of happiness in knowing that there is someone who needs them, as Jeslyn said:

'Kom by die huis, haai jinne, ek het hom so gemis. Ek het so leeg gevoel, want ek het hom nie gesien vir die dag nie.' (Coming home, oh goodness, I missed him so. I felt empty because I did not see him for the entire day. I: Jeslyn, p. 28, line 16).

From the excerpts above, it is apparent that whilst the women experienced mixed feelings about early motherhood and having to be responsible for another life, as time went by, they started gaining confidence in their skills and a deep appreciation for their growing relationship with their children.

4.4.1.2.2 *Single parenthood.*

The traditional idea of parenthood has changed radically over the last few decades. New types of family structures are on the rise, and within this particular community, the women spoke of the increasing presence of single parent families. All of the women in the study, except Jeslyn, who currently has a boyfriend with whom she and her child are living, are single parents. The co-researchers shared that being a single parent was often cumbersome. The challenges they experience were further exacerbated by the fact that they are not only the sole caregiver, but most times, except for support from the government, they carry a huge burden to support their children and families financially (Taylor & Conger, 2017). The fathers of these children often 'just walk out, easy peasy' (I: Kiah, p. 5, line 2) and the mothers are left as the sole breadwinners. Kiah gives us a glimpse the world of single parent when she states:

'Jy is as enkelouer, nè, jy is so besig om dinge bymekaar te kry en te worry oor wat die kinders eet en jy wil 'n werk kry en, en, en. Dan moet die kind alleen sukkel met sy skoolwerk.' (You are as single parent, you are so busy trying to get things together, and worrying about what the children will eat and you want to get a job and, and, and. Then the child has to struggle alone with schoolwork. FG: Kiah, p. 36, line 32).

The other co-researchers' agreed that raising a child alone is extremely difficult. Jeslyn summed up their experience as,

'om jou kind alleen groot te maak is 'n bietjie hard.' (To raise a child alone, is quite difficult. FG: Jeslyn, p. 33, line 17).

Additionally, single parenthood includes having to learn things by yourself,

'Ek is alleen. Ek is op my eie. Ek het geen werk. [...] Ek moes dinge vir myself uitgefigure.' (I am alone. I am on my own. I don't have a job [...] I had to figure things out for myself. I: Shandre, p. 3, line 2; p. 5, line 18).

This led to an increased sense of responsibility within the family unit, as Andrea pointed out:

‘[...] want ek is meer verantwoordelik, want op die oomblik is dit net ek en my kinders en my ouma wat saam bly. So ek is verantwoordelik vir alles in die huis in.’ (Because I am more responsible, because at this point it is me and my children and my grandmother that live together. So, I am responsible for everything in the home). (I: Andrea, p. 4, line 24)

Furthermore, the women in the study expressed a collaborative sense of pride that comes from raising children on their own, as Wanda so aptly said,

‘Ek het alleen vir hulle groot gemaak.’ (I raised them by myself. I: Wanda, p. 3, line 38).

These words can be reflected as a sense of pride or a degree of independence owing to empty promises by the fathers,

‘Ek vra nie vir hom geld of wat nie, want hy maak net aanmekaar leë beloftes.’ (I don’t ask him for money because he keeps making empty promises. FG: Wanda, p. 14, line 8).

The co-researchers were of the opinion that the fathers often neglected their sense of responsibility (see section 4.4.3.2.2).

Another element of being a single parent mentioned by the group was dating. Dating can be extremely daunting as you are bringing an unknown person into your existing family unit.

‘So ja, it’s very difficult to date as a single mother, because ekke, veral ek nou en my kinders is groot. Ek kan nie nou hier ’n man inbring nie, want nou stry ek en die man. Dan moet ek weer ’n ander een bring, ander ene bring.’ (So yes, it is very difficult to date as a single mother, because I, especially me now, my children are grown. I can’t bring a man here because what if this man and I fight. Then I have to bring another one, and another one. I: Kiah, p. 38, line 17).

The new partner’s beliefs, ways of being and presence may interfere with the well-being and dynamic in a single parent household. The women reflected on their journey of single motherhood and how they had accepted the challenge with open arms. These challenges could have been detrimental, yet a sense of resilience was present in their conversations.

4.4.1.2.3 Reflections on early motherhood.

As part of the co-researchers’ journeys into their lived experiences, they often reflected on how far they had come. During this study, they often thought back on what early motherhood meant for them and how it had transformed their trajectories. They also speculated in general about how early motherhood has influenced their quality of life. According to Kiah, in her view,

‘It’s the worst thing to happen to a young girl because life has different phases. And at one stage you were a baby, you become a toddler, you become a teen, you know. And babies are supposed to be had in marriage where you know it’s a stable foundation for the child to be born in and your

husband is helpful. [...] Teenage pregnancy is a huge problem. It can take a life, a young life and send it in a whole new direction and it's not always good. Some never come back.' (I: Kiah, p. 6, line 38; p. 16, line 21)

Wanda shared a similar view and added that whilst some young people feel they have a right to become pregnant,

'hulle weet nie wat is die nagevolge nie. Dis baie swaar. Ek dink nie 'n mens besef die nagevolge tot jy in daai situasie sit nie.' (They don't know what the consequences are. It's very difficult. I don't think people realise the consequences until they are put in that situation. I: Wanda, p. 5, line 44).

From the co-researchers' point of view, the girls in the community view pregnancy as a status symbol and a way for girls to show that the guy with whom they have a relationship, chose them and loves them more than other girls. Yet, according to all of the co-researchers, young girls do not realise the life-changing effects that having to raise a child, often on your own, may have. They are of the view that until they look into the eyes of their baby, they are unaware of how their lives will change. According to Wanda, it is only then, that many young girls realise the permanency of becoming a mother.

As part of the reflective journey, Jeslyn wondered what trajectory her life would have taken, had she had a mother figure during her teenage years:

'Ek vra myself nou nog, as my ma moes gelewe het, sou ek swanger gewees het, weet ek self nie. Want sy het vir my baie goed grootgemaak. Sy het vir my geleer wat die lewe kan bring, wat hy na jou kant toe kan gooi.' (I often ask myself, if my mother was still alive, would I have gotten pregnant, I don't know. She taught me well. She taught me what life had to offer, what could come your way. I: Jeslyn, p. 11, line 34).

Several co-researchers contemplated what their lives could have been like, how the baby came at the wrong time, and how the cards of life were not dealt fairly. Shandre found herself alone during her experience of early motherhood, with only her unborn child as comfort and a source of hope. She says she often sat talking to her baby, wondering what life would have in store for them and contemplating their future:

'Maar ek het altyd gesit en dan praat ek met hom. Dan sê ek altyd, dan as ek so hartseer voel, dan vryf ek oor my maag. Dan sê ek altyd, ek wil nie vir jou so 'n lewe gee nie. Hoekom het God vir jou die tyd gestuur? Jy moes nie nou gekom het nie, maar nog altyd, jy is hier.' (But I always sat and talked to him. Then I always say, when I am sad, then I rub my belly. Then I always say, I do not want to give you this type of life. Why did God send you to me in this time? You shouldn't have come now, but you are here. I: Shandre, p. 7, line 28).

All of the women agreed that, for them, early motherhood was not a planned occurrence, and as a consequence of an adolescent choice, they had had to endure multiple adversities during their lives.

4.4.1.3 *Responsibility to educate others.*

Through this journey, the women in the study realised that they too have a responsibility to discuss the topics of sex, sexuality, and pregnancy with their own children and even in the greater community. Several co-researchers shared how talking about sex and sexual education is a tricky thing as many of their parents did not ever discuss things like this with them. Kiah was honest when she disclosed that *'I'm not ready to have that conversation, because it feels uncomfortable'* (I: Kiah, p. 7, line 12). Adding to that, Rushay stated:

'It will be uncomfortable, but I will. When it comes to that age, like for example my firstborn is a girl. She is eleven now. But when she turns maybe like, when I see like she is starting now getting like periods and stuff like that, obviously I need to talk about it.' (I: Rushay, p. 7, line 28).

Having a child is a major responsibility and the women in the study explored their own roles in having to educate their children to equip them better for a bright future. Wanda stated that for parents to feel more at ease discussing topics such as sex openly and honestly with their children, they too need to be educated. She felt she herself needed

'help om vir my kennis te versterk net om vir hulle te kan verduidelik' (Help to strengthen my knowledge just to be able to explain to them. I: Wanda, p. 5, line 34).

All the women shared that their lived experience had made them conscious of the importance of having conversations that, whilst not easy, could have life-changing impacts. Andrea shared that she is finding it challenging to initiate these types of conversations with her daughter who is currently sixteen years old and at the stage of her life where she thinks young people may be exploring sexually. She says:

'Sy wil net nie luister nie. Maar waar het ek gesien waar die probleem lê, is toe haar pa vir haar 'n foon gekoop het, nou in die jaar in. En toe sien ek sy beginne spandeer meer tyd op die foon as enige iets anders. Ek laat nie toe dat hulle eintlik rondloop nie en hulle is by die huis, hulle is huiskinders. Maar die goed wat ek op die phone gesien het, ek het vir haar gesê, dit gaan daarnatoe lei dat sy op die einde van die dag gaan sy swanger raak, of sy gaan met HIV huis toe kom en dit is nie wat ek wil hê van haar af nie. Maar ek sal maar nou sien hoe gaan dinge nou verder gaan. Ek het saam met haar gepraat. [...] Maar ek besef nou, ek sal saam met haar moet sit en vir haar sê hoe sy vir my laat voel.' (She doesn't want to listen. But I saw where the problem lies, her dad bought her a phone in this year. Then I started seeing she is spending more time on the phone than anything else. I don't allow them to walk around. They are 'homebodies'. But the

things that I have seen on the phone, I told her, it will lead her getting pregnant or coming home with HIV and that is not what I want for her. But I will see how things carry on. I am going to talk to her. [...] but I realise now, I will have to sit down with her and tell her how she is making me feel. I: Andrea, p. 2, line 36; p. 8, line 31).

Leading from this, Shandre is of the opinion that sharing one's own story and having open and honest conversations with your children will help them to make better decisions regarding their own sexual experiences. She and others hope that

'[...] ek wil nie haar foute herhaal nie. [...] so ek weet dit vandag en ek leer dit vir my kind [...] So jy moet leer om verantwoordelik te wees. Wys hom die ondersteuning.' ([...] I don't want to repeat her mistakes. [...] so I know this today and I teach my child. [...] also teach him responsibility and show him support. I: Shandre, p. 8, line 21; p. 12, line 38; p. 14, line 11).

Additionally, Kiah felt that at the heart of change, lies empowerment.

'Our women needs to be empowered [...] like 80 per cent of the households are ran by women [...] there is in imbalance and where there is an imbalance there's problems' (I: Kiah, p. 5, line 32).

She, and many of the other women in the study are of the view that women within the Ukomelela community require skills training, such as sewing, hairdressing and nail technician competencies, as a way of empowerment. They expressed that when women feel empowered, have good jobs, and foster their identity from a stance of empowerment, they would not be so easily susceptible to the flattering words from men in the community. (This theme will be dealt with in more detail in Section 4.4.3.2.2).

From the above discussion, it is apparent that motherhood is a complex phenomenon. Listening to the women's lived experiences as well as their reflections of these experiences, made it clear that their voices are powerful and need to be heard. Additionally, their newly acquired role of 'mother' played an important part in identity formation and how the co-researchers viewed themselves and how this view was adapted through the distinct phases of life.

4.4.2 Identity

Identity formation is an integral part of healthy development for all individuals. It is our answer to who we are and how we view ourselves. In this study, identity takes on a reflective stance, through posing questions such as, 'Who am I?'. However, the women in the study do not form their identities in isolation. They are part of a greater system. By taking the bio-ecological systems theory (see section 2.2) into account, we further ask the question 'Who are we [as a community, as a group of women, as mothers]?'.

According to Vignoles et al. (2011), identity comprises both the thoughts of who you are, as well as the actions of being, in interpersonal settings and intergroup interactions. In the following section, the category of identity will be explored by reflecting on the phases of identity, conflicts that might arise during identity formation, and the effects that group identity might have on the women in the study. This category will conclude with a reflective look at the women's current identities and how their lived experiences of motherhood and the events that preceded the study merged to form a redemptive identity, as displayed below:

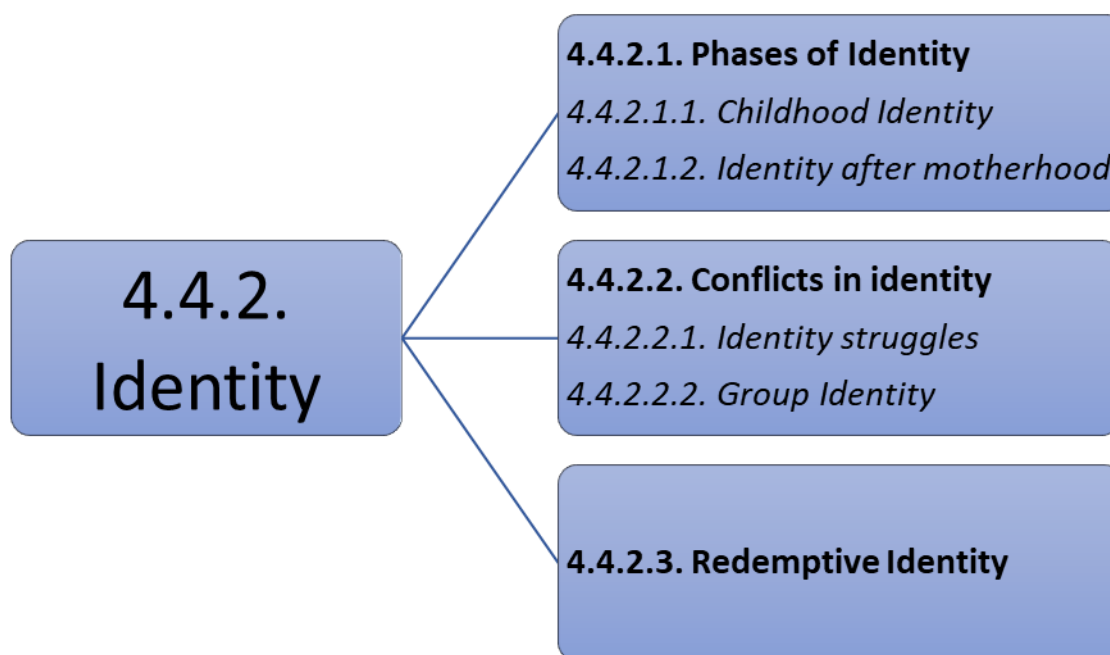


Figure 4.7 Category Two: Identity (Source: Author)

4.4.2.1 Phases of identity.

Identity formation occurs throughout our lifespan and may take on new aspects as we age or experience certain life-changing events. When analysing the data, the distinct phases of identity were apparent. The women in the study specifically voiced their identities as young girls and elaborated on certain events that occurred that had an impact on how they viewed themselves as adolescents. Furthermore, the women explored how motherhood and the events surrounding this phenomenon impacted their identity formation.

4.4.2.1.1. Childhood identity.

When we think of childhood, we often think of innocence, playfulness, and laughter. Although the women in the study shared wonderful memories as children, these were often overshadowed by other notable

events. While exploring their lived realities of childhood, the co-researchers frequently made a distinction between life inside the home environment and life outside of the home environment.

For many of the co-researchers, their childhood inside the home was described as a time of having adult responsibilities which overshadowed the youthfulness of play. Growing up with her elderly grandmother, Rushay was often required to do most of the household chores in the home. She shared an extremely strict upbringing during which she felt she had little agency because as a young girl:

'I was staying with my grandmother. I didn't have a chance like to go and play outside with other kids and all those stuff. I had to take care of my grandmother, cook and all that stuff.' (I: Rushay, p. 3, line 12).

In contrast to seeing the inside of the home as a place of rules and little freedom, Wanda expressed that she enjoyed spending time indoors by her mother's side. She experienced her home environment as a place of safety and security where she could be herself, especially around her mother:

'Ek was 'n baie stil meisie. En ek het vir my met niemand gemeng nie. Ek was net myself en as ek in die huis gesit het, dan was ek by my ma. As my ma nie by die huis gewees het nie, dan slaap ek heeltyd, want ek wil nie met iemand wees buite nie. Ek het nie met my broer geworry nie. Ek het nie met my suster geworry nie.' (I was a very quiet girl. I didn't mix with anyone. I was just myself and when I was inside the house, I was with my mom. When my mom wasn't home, then I'd sleep the whole time, I didn't want to be outside with anyone. I didn't care about my brother. I didn't care about my sister. I: Wanda, p. 5, line 42).

The home environment forms an integral part of the system in which children learn about themselves and how to trust others in their lives, especially adults. In contrast to how Wanda experienced her home, Andrea stated that she did not experience her home environment as safe, and she preferred to be outside where she could be herself. For her, as with other co-researchers, the home proved to be a place filled with negativity and little agency. Andrea described how spending time with her friends made her feel more empowered outside of the home:

'Ek het baie gehou van met my vriende uitgaan, lag en gesels, grappies maak. Ek was baie happy gewees buitekant, buitekant die huis. Maar binne-in die huis was dit 'n ander storie gewees.' (I loved going out with my friends, laughing and chatting and making jokes. I was very happy outside, outside of the home. But inside the house it was a different story. I: Andrea, p. 4, line 27).

For many of the women in the study, there was a clear distinction with regard to living two different lives, one with their family and one within their friendship groups. Life outside the home was often a place

where the co-researchers felt at peace and accepted by their peers. They voiced that they enjoyed a sense of freedom.

According to them, life outside and around the community was, however, not faultless. Ukomelela is fraught with alcohol and drug abuse. The women shared that poverty is boundless and, according to them, many young people there grow up not knowing anything other than what they are exposed to in their community (see section 4.4.3 for more information around community factors). Kiah and others shared that these negative influences significantly contributed to their identity formation:

'We were just running around barefoot, watching the adults get drunk, you know. There was a soccer field and that was the only activity other than people getting drunk around here and smoking whatever they're smoking.' (I: Kiah, p. 3, line 32).

The co-researchers concur with this view and in their interviews shared the view that most of the adults in the community were often not 'the best of role models' for the young people in Ukomelela. According to the co-researchers, as adolescence set in, it appeared to be easier for the young people to follow in these adults' footsteps as they were the only role models they were exposed to. One of the co-researchers, in particular, alluded to how these adults influenced her view on life and how this impacted her decision-making:

'I was reckless. I used to drink a lot and smoke a lot. I would smoke Dagga sometime. I was careless. I didn't care about anyone or anything, not even myself.' (I: Kiah, p. 9, line 32).

Even though there were multiple negative influences within the community, all of the women said a good education and the fulfilment of their dreams were all they craved. Shandre recalled the aspirations she had at school,

'Atletiek gedoen op skool. Ek het gesing in die kerk. My droom was, ek wil altyd aktrise gewees het, altyd 'n movie star gewees het. Ek wil op die TV gewees het, presenter, movie star. Ek wil die wêreld getravel het. Daai was ek. [...] Ek het vriende gehet. Baie geïnteresseerd in my werk, in my skoolloopbaan. Ek was mal, in 'n goeie manier. Daai was ek. Ek het, ek was 'n different mens by die huis as wat ek is by die skool. By die skool al die onderwysers was mal vir my gewees. Ek het gesels met al my onderwysers. Ek het baie gedroom. Daai was ek. Baie gedroom.' (Did athletics at school. I sang in the church. My dream was, I have always wanted to be an actress, a movie star. I wanted to be on TV, presenter, movie star. I wanted to travel the world. That was me. I had friends. Very interested in my work, in my school career. I as crazy, in a good way. That was me. I was a different person at home than at school. At school all the teachers were mad about me. I spoke to all the teachers. I dreamt a lot. That was me. I dreamt. I: Shandre, p. 14, line 45; p. 15, line 7).

As with many of the women who become mothers during their teenage years, these dreams were short-lived. Many of the stories shared by the co-researchers were tinged with hurt and pain. In addition, negative influences within the community and home environment painted a different reality for the young women. Like other communities rife with drugs and alcohol their community is often associated with high numbers of sexual assault. Sexual abuse in childhood creates complications for healthy identity formation as well as for psychological adjustment (Trickett et al., 2011). Shandre mentioned her own experience of sexual abuse when she was in Grade 8. She spoke of traumatic effects that are everlasting and which created a ripple effect in her identity and how she views herself and her worth:

'Standerd 6 [...] dit wat dit toe beginne worse raak. Erg, soos in erg raak dat ek standerd 6 was ek, jammer nou, maar ek is gemaklik om dit te sê, was ek gerape gewees deur my eie antie se man gewees. En daar het die lewe vir my heeltemal deurmekaar gegaan. So ek was confused tussen wat was en wat is. En daai oomblik het ek nie die liefde verstaan nie, because why, jy is 'n jongmeisie wat net al jou begeerte is net om jou skoolloopbaan te voltooi en dat jy kan iets maak van jou lewe, maar dit kon toe nie gebeur nie.' (Standard 6 [...] that is when everything got worse. Bad, like bad, that I was, sorry, but I am comfortable saying this, I was raped by my own aunt's husband. And that is when life became confusing. I was so confused between what was and what is. And in that moment, I didn't understand love, because why, you are a young girl whose only desire is to finish school and make something of your life, but it couldn't happen. I: Shandre, p. 2, line 32).

Unfortunately, Shandre was not the only co-researcher with such a tragic experience as a young girl. Kiah elaborated on her own encounter with sexual abuse and how this related to shame and guilt:

'En om gerape ook te word, you know, veral as dit jou familielid is. Jy sien die persoon weer en niemand weet daarvan nie. En jy kyk net die persoon en hy gaan ook aan met sy lewe. Hy weet wat het hy gedoen, maar hy gaan nie vir jou om verskoning vra nie. En jy gaan ook mos nou nie baklei nie. Dan gaan almal mos nou weet, you know. Nou loop jy heeltyd met die bitter hart.' (And to be raped, you know, especially by a family member. You see the person again and no one knows about it. And you look at the person and he just carries on with his life. He knows what he has done, but he is not going to apologise to you. And you are not going to fight either. Then everyone will know. So you keep walking with a bitter heart. FG: Kiah, p. 3, line 5).

According to the women, being a victim of sexual abuse often meant that the transition into adulthood occurred overnight. The one moment they were filled with innocence and purity and the next that was taken away from them and filled with confusion. Kiah voiced this transition when she said:

'Dit is net in ons gemeenskap. Die een minuut is jy 'n kind. Jy deal nog met die traumas wat met jou gebeur as 'n kind. As jy vir jou kom kry, hier is jou huis. Jy al so moeg vinnig grootword. Jy is al so moeg. Nou moet jy 'n grootmens wees, sjoe. Ek het sommer gesê, ek het nie opgesign vir hierdie dinge nie.' (It is just in our community. The one minute you are a child. You are still dealing with the traumas of what happened to you as a child. The next moment, here is your house. You are so tired of growing up fast. You are so tired. Now you must be an adult, goodness. I said, I didn't sign up for all these things. FG: Kiah, p 23, line 43).

Childhood intertwined with adulthood at an incredibly young age for the co-researchers. One of the women summed up their fast-tracked journeys into adulthood succinctly, when she stated:

'Soms dan gebeur goed met 'n mens in die lewe [...] Jy wil net speel en gelukkig wees daai kind. Alles is net lekker, jy weet. Nou gebeur seer dinge met jou. Nou beginne jy inkrimp en jy limit jouself.' (Sometimes things happen to you in life [...] You just want to play and be a happy child. Everything is just fun, you know. Now hurtful things happen to you. Now you retract and start limiting yourself. FG: Kiah, p. 1, line 14).

From the excerpts above it was obvious that many of the co-researchers experienced traumatic events that had had a negative impact on their sense of self-worth. They, however, shared that participating in the CBPAR project encouraged critical reflection through which they came to understand the value of sharing with others and how it could help them understand their current choices and decisions. In sharing their hurt and sadness through their stories, we understand that it is important to remember Shandre's words, *'Agter elke jong meisie is daar 'n storie'* (Every girl has a story to tell. I: Shandre, p. 8, line 38). In this study, those words cannot ring more truly. As seen from the above extracts by the co-researchers, each one of them had a story that changed the trajectory of their lives and intertwined with their identities.

4.4.2.1.2 Identity after motherhood.

The transition from adolescence into young adulthood occurred rapidly for the women in the study. When reflecting on literature, young adulthood is a time described by Erikson when individuals seek out a sense of identity, sexual partners, and a sense of intimacy (Orenstein & Lewis, 2020). For the co-researchers, this time was eclipsed by having to care for a small child, often on their own. This transition impacted their identity formation through the confusion of developmental phases.

Experiencing early motherhood for all of them meant that there was no subtle transition from childhood to early adulthood, as Rushay said:

'I was still a child. I didn't know nothing about babies and stuff.' (I: Rushay, p. 3, line 4).

Kiah further mentioned,

'Ek het nie geweet wat dit is eerstens om 'n ouer te wees nie.' (I didn't know what it meant firstly to be a parent. FG: Kiah, p. 34, line 25).

The almost rushed transitioning period illustrates that they had no time to acquire the knowledge and skills that come with moving normally through the various developmental stages. They shared that just as in growing up, there is no manual that comes with having a baby. Additionally, in their experience, very few other women who had gone through similar situations, had stepped up to guide them or to share their knowledge. They also shared that oftentimes young women are rejected and abandoned by their families during this time. According to one of the co-researchers, the abandonment was subtle, yet still painful in her case,

'She [my mom] did see me differently. She didn't like treat me like she used to treat me before. So ja, she did see me differently. Even the way to talk now to me, she didn't talk like we talked before. She was talking with me like, you must know that you have a child now. You are big and stuff like that, ja, so.' (I: Rushay, p. 9, line 35).

'Who do I turn to?' was a common sentiment shared by the women, and throughout our journey this clear pattern appeared in the women's narrative responses regarding their change in identity. An example of their disbelief about this change was mentioned,

'[...] want ek kan nie glo nie. Is ek nou 'n ma?' ([...] because I cannot believe it. Am I now a mom? FG: Shandre, p. 27, line 49).

This sentiment was echoed by Jeslyn who revealed that for her, motherhood did not come naturally but that she had to learn how to be a mother (FG: Jeslyn, p. 33, line 8). Motivated by their own lived experiences and wanting to provide a better quality of life for their children, most of the women continually reminded themselves:

'dit het vir my so baie beteken [om 'n ma te wees], want ek het myself belowe, wat ek nie gekry het by die huis of binne-in die huis nie, gaan ek alles vir haar in my vermoë doen om vir haar te gee [...]. Dit het vir my deurgedruk, gemotiveer hoe om 'n ma te kan wees, om te beste te kan doen vir my kinders' (It meant so much to me [to be a mother], because I promised myself, what I did not get at home or inside the home, I will do everything in my power to give to her. It pushed me through, motivated me on how to be a mother, to give the best to my children. I: Andrea, p. 3, line 27; p. 5, line 12).

This instinctive motherly love and sense of responsibility was a source of agency in the co-researchers' journeys. They wanted to give their own children what they had never had.

Stemming from this pursuit of increased responsibility to care for their children, the co-researchers experienced motherhood as a positive influence on their lives. Many of the women mentioned that in their younger years they were involved in questionable activities, but that motherhood led to a change in identity and self-understanding. Rushay, described herself as a *'party girl'* who often used to go out before she had a child. She recalls that the nights were raucous and often filled with dancing, lots of alcohol, the occasional drugs, and men. However, she says, after becoming a mother:

'I don't do that. I don't do that anymore. I just sit down, taking care of my children, go to work' (I: Rushay, p. 10, line 12).

Similarly, Jeslyn, shared that she had been an avid smoker and drug user in her youth until her son was diagnosed with tuberculosis (TB) at a nearby hospital. Whilst sitting in the waiting room, she saw other mothers, who were drug users, also bringing their children for TB treatment, and it struck a chord with her. During the focus group discussions, she shared that witnessing the vulnerability of the children showed her:

'En daar het ek besef die goed wat ek doen, is nie reg nie. Hier moet ek na 'n kant toe kom. [...] ek het gelê met [my kind] en daar het ek besef by die hospitaal, ek moet my ways change, want daar was mense wat met hulle kinders vas gesit het daar. Hulle lewe, daai was hulle huis. [...] En toe is dit daar wat ek besef, ek moet my ways change.' (And there I realised the things I do are not right. Here I have to choose a side. [...] I was lying with [my child] and there I realised at the hospital, I need to change my ways because there were people stuck with their children. Their lives, that was their house [...] And then it's there that I realise I need to change my ways. FG: Jeslyn, p. 18, line 36).

The women were touched by Jeslyn's agency in her recollection of the story of her turnaround and active decision-making. They agreed that coming to a point where they finally made the decision to let go of their 'old ways', was difficult. When talking about these 'old ways', all of the co-researchers mentioned a form of addiction that they had experienced before they realised that it did not fit with their identities as mothers. Kiah shared that often visiting the taverns for a drink or to smoke with her friends had been part of her lifestyle even though,

'Ek het nooit gemaklik gevoel om my kind saam te vat [tavern toe] nie. So ek het nie meer gedrink nie.' (I never felt comfortable taking my child to the tavern. So I stopped drinking. FG: Kiah, p. 34 line 28).

Adding to this, Shandre voiced pride in her decision to change her lifestyle because she wanted to have a healthy pregnancy and ensure that

'hy [haar seun] was baie groot en gesond, because why ek het nie gedrink en ek het nie gerook met hom nie.' (He [her son] was very big and healthy, because why I did not drink or smoke with him. I: Shandre, p. 13, line 46).

Rushay told us that while she understood the health risks related to her negative lifestyle, she was conflicted about how becoming a mother for the first time would change how she lived. According to her, it was only after the birth of her second child that she realised she needed to adopt a more permanent lifestyle change. In her view, her transition happened almost in the blink of an eye,

'everything just changed about me. That is where I realised that now I am a mother. I need to leave some other stuff I used to do and I need to become more, ja, as a person. So I think my children did change me.' I: Rushay, p. 10, line 36).

In contrast to the aforementioned, the change brought about by motherhood has also left its mark on the women's autonomy. According to the women, motherhood often infringed on their freedom to go places and do activities they used to enjoy with their friends. Additionally, motherhood left some of the women feeling almost directionless. Jeslyn's response exemplifies the women's experience about this feeling that

'die moeilikste tye was wanneer ek, ek kan niks vir myself doen nie. Ek voel vas. Ek het nie rigting nie. Ek het, sit maar nou net met my kindjie opgeskeep. Ek kan maar net by die venster uitkyk. Al die dinge wat ek altyd gedoen het, kon ek nie meer. Dit het gevoel, ek het baie vas gevoel. Asof daar nie rigting in my lewe, asof daar geen rigting is nie.' (the hardest times were when I, I can do nothing for myself. I feel stuck. I have no direction. I just sat cooped up with the baby. I can only look out the window. All the things I always did, I could no longer do. It felt, I felt very stuck. As if there is no direction in my life, as if there is no direction. FG: Jeslyn, p 33, line 28).

Despite all the feelings of being overwhelmed from time to time, the women in the study felt that they had to stay strong to take care of their children,

'jy moet sterk wees vir hom en vir jouself' (You have to be strong for him and for yourself. I: Shandre, p. 5, line 28).

They are of the view that staying 'strong' meant that,

'ek doen dit alles vir hom, want ek wil 'n goeie ma wees vir hom. So hy kan, as ek 'n goeie ma is, gaan hy 'n goeie jongman word'. (I do everything for him because I want to be a good mom for him. So he can be a good young man, if I am a good mother to him. I: Shandre, p. 12, line 32).

They felt that if their identity as a mother became so intertwined with setting a good example, it would lead to their children forming solid identities later in life.

By engaging with the women and listening to their stories, it is clear that, in their experience, motherhood had been something completely new and unfamiliar during their teen years. To them, it brought about a change in identity that happened almost overnight. Motherhood introduced new roles and new ways of being and doing into their lives. Despite the changes in their new roles, they continue to consider the broader personal developmental question of 'Who am I?'

4.4.2.2 Conflicts in identity.

The answer to the question of 'Who am I?' is never a simple one. The co-researchers regularly faced situations and challenges that brought about conflicting ideas and thoughts related to this question. Owing to the rapid changes in circumstances and events in their lives they often experienced conflict related to their identity throughout the process of their development. According to Erikson, conflict occurs in various developmental stages, and this is often deemed to be natural. Identity struggles are not isolated to the research population, but their resilience in dealing with these challenges will prove vital to accessing their redemptive identities.

4.4.2.2.1 Identity struggles.

Identity struggles were a challenge for the women as they were navigating adolescence, motherhood, family issues, friendships, and mental health struggles. During the focus group discussions, the women mentioned that their racial identity was often something difficult to navigate in Ukomelela as the population in the community was diverse. The women in the study, who were from a mixed-race background, found integrating challenging. A good example that illustrates this issue is summed up by Kiah when she said:

'ek weet nie is ek coloured nie. Ek weet nie is ek swart nie. Ek weet nie is ek mooi nie, is ek lelik nie.' (I do not know if I am coloured. I do not know if I am black. I do not know if I'm pretty, if I'm ugly. FG: Kiah, p. 12, line 43).

According to the co-researchers, this unstable foundation was exacerbated by the addition of becoming a mother during their teenage years.

As the initial novelty and excitement of being a new mother wore off, the women found it difficult to continually incorporate the idea of motherhood into their identity. They often expressed a longing for their 'old ways' of being. Rushay mentioned that *'the time my baby was six months, I just started partying, leave the child with my mom. Started doing naughty stuff with my friends.'* (I: Rushay, p. 3, line 11). She elaborated that her mother tried to stop her and often reminded her of her responsibilities of being a mother. According to Rushay, her mother declared that she *'can't run away and leave the baby here with [her].'* (I: Rushay, p. 3, line 13).



Figure 4.8 Rushay's clay model (Source: Author)

She further depicted her struggle with identity change in her clay model (figure 4.8). The views shared in the group reflected struggles between being a carefree teenager and a responsible mother. The view others had of the women was often in contrast with how they understood themselves,

'al die mense hier buite sien 'n sterk vrou, maar ek sien niks' (All the people outside see a strong woman, but I see nothing. FG: Kiah, p. 1, line 15).

The women were also of the view that the traumatic events which they had experienced throughout their lives had influenced their understanding and confusion in forming an identity. Kiah shared a particularly poignant story that had had a devastating impact on how she thinks of herself,

'I was five years old. I was in the Karoo with my dad's sister, and she made me sit on the porch there [...] I cannot sit in the house. I also cannot play with her [my aunt's] children. I just have to sit there. Whether it's raining or the sun is shining, you're sitting on that porch. I was depressed at five years old. I was hurt and I missed my mom and dad. And my aunt refused to give me food. [...] I'm just like that, Aunt, I'm hungry. I'm sitting there on the porch. She says to her friend [that I am hungry], her friend is coming to me. She takes me behind my neck. She runs with me down the porch and she pushes my face inside the dog's bowl. She says, "eat here". I am now 36 years old. I walk now my whole life, 31 years I walk with that depression, that rejection, that isolation.' (FG: Kiah, p. 1, line 29; p. 2, line 14).

Stories like these are unfortunately not isolated events for the women. According to them, events like this had resulted in many created identity struggles because other's opinions and judgements often impacted their sense of self-worth. Another reoccurring topic during the discussions related to the ongoing challenges with their general well-being and mental health. Some of the women shared traumatic experiences, such as childhood sexual abuse, which continued to impact their mental health. These experiences, according to some of the co-researchers, and particularly Shandre, highlight the complex nature of the ongoing mental health challenges like spirituality, suicide ideation, and suicide attempts. In the focus group she disclosed that

'Maar die dag toe dit met my gebeur is dit like, ek gee op op God. Ek is kwaad vir God, want jy is veronderstel om na my te kyk en by my te wees. Hoekom allow jy dit? En daai is waar ek afgedwaal het en net besluit het, maar ek gee op op die lewe. Ek het twee keer probeer vir my doodmaak, pille gedrink, polse gesny. [...] dan sê ek dit vir myself, jy is 'n mislukking.' (But the day it happened to me it's like, I give up on God. I'm angry with God because He was supposed to look after me and be with me. Why did You allow this? And that's where I strayed and just decided, but I'm giving up on life. I tried to kill myself twice, drank pills, cut my wrists. [...] then I say it to myself, you are 'n failure. FG: Shandre, p. 5, line 24).

When I consulted with the women about whether or not they would be comfortable with me sharing their mental health difficulties and contemplations of suicide, they permitted me to include it. Jeslyn mentioned that the reasons she may have experienced mental health issues during her pregnancy was probably

'seker maar net die hormone en die feit dat ek my ma gemis het.' (Probably just the hormones and the fact that I missed my mother. I: Jeslyn, p. 12, line 39).

In the focus group session, Wanda shared her experience of depression and the importance of understanding that each of them may have experienced depression in diverse ways. She recalled neglecting her personal hygiene and nutritional needs, according to her,

'Ek het nie gebad nie. Ek het nie geworry oor kos nie. (I didn't bath. I didn't worry about food. FG: Wanda, p. 24, line 38).

In addition, the women shared that the isolation, rejection, and anxieties about raising a child often made them feel that they would have been better off

'as ek moes dood gewees het [...] Daar is baie dae, even die jaar wat ek gevoel het, kyk hier, suicide, hier kom ek.' (If I had been dead [...] There were many days, even in this year, that I felt, look here, suicide, here I come. FG: Kiah, p. 1, line 12).

The above extracts made it apparent that the women in this study struggled with forming their identities owing to a variety of factors. These struggles often led to mental health issues and coping with suicidal

thoughts. During the focus group discussion, Kiah mentioned something valuable that resonated with the co-researchers:

'Elke dag is 'n challenge en elke dag is 'n nuwe probleem wat ons aanvat, maar as jy met ghosts van jou verlede kom, dit eet jou so op van binne dat jy nie eers laterhand – jy voel net lusteloos vir die lewe. Jy gee hoop op.' (Every day is a challenge, and every day is a new problem that we take on, but when you come with ghosts from your past, it eats you up from the inside that later - you just feel lifeless. You give up hope. FG: Kiah, p. 4).

4.4.2.2.2. Group identity.

As with the previous subtheme, the women further experienced conflict with their group identities. This subtheme is therefore concerned with gaining insight into the women's lived realities of the pressure to belong and fit into a group. A clear pattern appeared in the women's responses, indicating that their lack of love in the familial system often led them to seek external affection and attention. Wanda voiced how she felt that young men often prey on the vulnerability of girls, by saying:

'ek voel my ma en my pa gee nie vir my liefde nie. My familie, ek is die least. Nou kom hy ['n man] Hy weet waar is jou swak punte.' (I feel my mom and dad do not give me love. My family, I am the least. Now he [a man] comes. He knows where your weak points are. FG: Wanda, p. 12, line 30).

This sentiment was echoed by Kiah, who voices her opinion that

'Jou swak punt is boyfriends, jy, want jy soek liefde. Jy soek acceptance, you know. Hy gee altyd.' (Your weakness is boyfriends, you, because you seek love. You seek acceptance, you know. He always gives it. FG: Kiah, p. 12 line 41).

In addition to the above, Shandre mentioned that in seeking affection, she got involved with a boy who was addicted to drugs, and this changed how she thought of herself. She recalled:

'Ek het beginne messed up raak. Verkeerde vrinde, beginne drink, beginne rook. Ek het danya gerook vir die stress en alles, want jy wil inpas. Jy wil deel wees van die mense. Jy wil vergeet van jou verlede en dit is hoe ek myself gesien het.' (I started getting messed up. Wrong friends, started drinking, started smoking. I smoked marijuana for the stress and everything because you want to fit in. You want to be a part of the crowd. You want to forget about your past and that's how I viewed myself. I: Shandre, p. 3, line 11).

Group identity and the need to belong often lead adolescents to engage in harmful psycho-social activities. However, it is also important to note that, owing to their underdeveloped pre-frontal cortex,

adolescents' decision-making is not yet fully mature (Arain et al., 2013). For this reason, many of the women in the study share the experiences they engaged in when they were adolescents:

'was just doing stuff like for fun. I didn't know like actually the consequences of the stuff I'm doing, where is it going to put me'. (I: Rushay, p. 13, line 46).

Wanting to belong is a common factor in adolescence and it often results in young people succumbing to peer pressure. Jeslyn describes this experience of belonging within her community as being influenced:

'Die feit dat dit buitekant laat is en dit 'n smokkelhuis is. Party van die tjomies het dit [drugs] gedoen en sekerlik gevra, wil jy nie 'n bietjie hê nie. En dan nee, nee, nee heeltyd. En dan voel ek agterna ek vat maar 'n bietjie.' (The fact that it's late outside and it's a Shebeen. Some of the guys did it [drugs] and surely asked, do you not want a little? And then no, no, no all the time. And then afterwards I feel like just taking a little. I: Jeslyn, p. 6, line 20).

All the women in the study agreed about the increased pressure to engage in risky behaviour in order to fit in, particularly in their community where drugs and alcohol were easily accessible. According to them, there are taverns and Shebeens around every corner and it's exceedingly difficult to get away from the pressure placed on them by their peers to participate in substance abuse. To this end, personal agency was often compromised, *'[...] not because it's who I am, but it is what circumstances made me.'* (I: Kiah, p. 12, line 50).

4.4.2.3 Redemptive identity.

This theme was concerned with gaining in-depth knowledge of the co-researchers' current views of themselves and how their adverse experiences had shaped them into the women they are today. A redemptive identity can therefore be described as an objective description of one's own lived experience in order to make sense of that experience and to give it purpose and meaning. According to McAdams (2013), redemption is, therefore, 'a deliverance from suffering to a better world' by replacing the negative with the positive, in other words 'putting the past behind' us and moving forward (p. 14). All of the co-researchers held the view that at this stage in their lives, they no longer consider themselves to be defenceless young girls with no agency in their lives. They now see themselves as women, mothers, and active members of a community. All of these various aspects play into the notion of self-understanding and help to develop and refine their identity. Whilst everyone agrees that the journey to this point has not been easy, they concur with Wanda that:

'jy moet weer tot op 'n punt kom waar jy kom besef wie jy rêrig is, watter soorte mens jy rêrig is. Apart van daai'. (You have to get back to a point where you come to realise who you really are, what kind of person you really are. Apart from that hurt. FG: Wanda, p. 17, line 7).

Adversity and pain created strength for the women in the study as they shared that having gone through challenging times often made them realise their intrinsic strength and resilience. Many of the women shared Rushay's sentiment that becoming a mother had a positive impact on their lives and shaped their redemptive identities:

'My life experience actually made me the person I am today. Like, for example, my children made me the person I am today. They keep me strong. The reason they keep me strong is because like I'm living actually my life now for them. So any time when I feel weak, I'm like thinking back, like, ja, I have children, you know.' (I: Rushay, p. 14, line 12).

Becoming a mother appears to go hand in hand with being more responsible, particularly as the co-researchers often included this notion within their redemptive identities. This maternal responsibility appears to have led to wisdom and the ability to tackle different feelings and thoughts. Shandre summed it up as:

'Dit het vir my meer volwasse gemaak, meer wyser gemaak, eerlik, want jy, jy leer baie by dit. Dis baie dinge wat jy leer. Dis baie gevoele wat jy voel en dis baie gedagtes wat jy kry gepaard met alles. Geleer daaruit en ek het grootgeword daaruit. Dit het my gehelp ook in 'n way.' (It made me more mature, made me wiser, honestly, because you, you learn a lot from it. There are many things you learn. It's a lot of feelings you feel and it's a lot of thoughts you associated with everything. Learned from it and I grew up from it. It also helped me in a way. I: Shandre, p. 17, line 37).

For Andrea, her redemptive identity has also taken on a more responsible side, and she is proud of this change and development of who she is:

'So ek is nou baie mature. En ek hou daarvan.' (So I'm very mature now. And I like it. I: Andrea, p. 4, line 26).

The views shared in the group were that developing a redemptive identity was not an overnight occurrence, but rather a lifelong process. All of the women developed stronger notions of who they are and a more in-depth understanding of self. As they reflected on their identities, one thing was clear; their usage of positive words to describe themselves, increased. Kiah, like so many of the women, finally came to a point of self-acceptance, and states:

'I would say I'm a good person, because everyone who rejected me is now loving me. So I love this Kiah. Not as much as I would like to, you know, because I'm not yet there, but I like it and I'm grateful for where I am now.' (FG: Kiah, p. 10, line 12).

Finally, accepting the skin you are in and all the struggles you've been through, is a journey, as the co-researchers explained to me,

'Dis 'n hele proses. Dit gebeur nie oornag nie. Dit gaan met 'n klomp trane gepaard.' (It's an entire process. It does not happen overnight. It is accompanied by a lot of tears. FG: Jeslyn, p. 10, line 21).

4.4.3 Community

A community can be defined as a group of members having similar characteristics who establish their own ways of being, through collaboration (Banks, et al., 2013; Stewart & Townley, 2020). Within the small community of Ukomelela, the women and I explored the factors that they confront within their community and considered the way in which these factors may have had either a positive or a negative impact on their identity, choices, motherhood, and self-understanding. Below are the themes and subthemes discussed in this category:

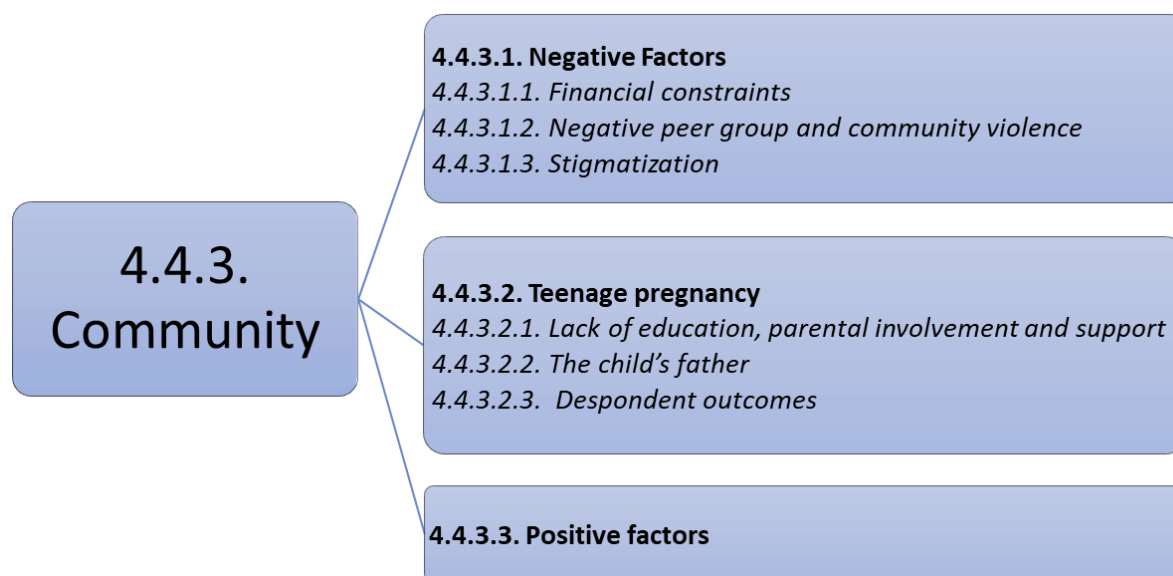


Figure 4.9 Category Three: Community (Source: Author)

4.4.3.1 Negative factors.

Negative factors are present within all communities and the small, marginalised community of Ukomelela is no different. In the course of our collaboration, we explored the various negative factors present in the community and considered how they felt these may have had an impact on their identity formation and in particular, their ideas of what motherhood entailed. In the sections that follow, I present the various issues within the community that the women considered pertinent to the research focus. Some of these which emerged in our discussion include financial constraints and the issue of poverty, the negative

impact of peer pressure, community violence and stigmatisation. In addition, the co-researchers felt it was important for us to understand that issues pertaining to drug and alcohol abuse, gender-based violence, domestic violence and teenage pregnancy underlie everyday life in Ukomelela.

4.4.3.1.1. *Financial constraints.*

Financial constraints are a great concern in the community. According to the women, Ukomelela lacks employment and financial stability for the community members of different ages and genders. Almost from the onset, it became apparent that these financial constraints related to socio-economic variables such as *'having food, having shoes, having clothes, electricity, proper roads, no clinic or the clinic was too small, still is.'* (I: Kiah, p. 1, line 3), that needed to be addressed within Ukomelela.

Throughout our discussions, poverty seemed to loom over most of their life decisions. All of the women in the study shared that they are either unemployed or only work occasionally. These financial challenges were a spillover from what they had experienced in their families whilst they were growing up. According to all of the co-researchers they were often *'afthanklik van daai SASSA'* (dependant on SASSA. I: Shandre, p. 4, line 20). The women often recalled with sadness what they experienced during their upbringing. Basic provisions like food, toiletries and housing were particularly challenging. According to Jeslyn, in her part of the community there were *'meestal hokke om my'* (mostly shacks around me. I: Jeslyn, p. 1, line 21). The state of the accommodation and an early realisation that in general life was expensive, meant that some of the women like Shandre needed to start doing 'odd jobs' as a young girl in order to afford her own toiletries and sanitary pads. She and some of the others share a measure of agency in trying to take care of themselves. According to her,

'Ek het altyd gesukkel as 'n jong meisie om toiletries te kry, om vir myself sakgeld te kry [...] die lewe is baie duur. Dis baie swaar. Dis baie moeilik. Maar ek het altyd as 'n jong meisie om vir my eie sakgeld te verdien, altyd aangebied om mense se huise skoon te maak, babysitting te doen naweke om my eie geld te kry, dat ek kan my eie sanitaries koop en so wat 'n jong meisie nodig het.' (I always struggled as a young girl to get toiletries, to get pocket money for myself [...] life is very expensive. It's very hard. It's very difficult. As a young girl I always tried to earn my own pocket money, always cleaning people's houses, babysitting on weekends to get my own money, that I could buy my own sanitary pads that a young girl needs. I: Shandre, p. 1, line 9).

The housing crisis experienced by many people in the community currently means continued exposure to the elements. One of the women shared that living in a shelter did not always mean safety, as sometimes

'het baie gereën. Baie koud gekry in die aand. Partykeer het ons se dak afgewaaai. Dan moes ons nou regop sit in die nag en dit was nou maar net daai' (It rained a lot. Got very cold in the evening. Sometimes our roof blew off. Then we had to sit up straight at night and it was just that. I: Jeslyn, p. 1, line 42).

Another co-researcher, Wanda, did not even have shelter in a shack, and she and her children had to sleep on the streets.

Although becoming pregnant at a young age was challenging in many ways, for one of the co-researchers, the harsh reality of growing up in poverty was just too much for her to bear at times. When she got pregnant, it was seen as a blessing in disguise because

'my kind se pa, hy het 'n baie goeie werk. En al wat ek kon gedink het, is net aan die geld. Hy sal vir my help dat ek vir my kan dinge koop in die huis en wat ek nodig het.' (My child's father, he has a very good job. And all I could think about was just the money. He will help me so that I can buy things for myself in the house and what I need. I: Andrea, p. 3, line 39).

In order to be able to provide for their children meant finding a job was high priority. However, for many of them, like many others in South Africa, it was almost impossible to find employment. Currently, according to Reuter's 2021 report, the unemployment rate in South Africa is estimated at 34.4 per cent in the second quarter of 2021. This amounts to more or less seven million people who are currently without a stable income. During the focus group discussions, the women shared that even providing for the basic needs of their children was almost impossible because they did not have money. The women could relate to Jeslyn's explanation of how she had to be creative in order to make her own nappies,

'dan vat ek 'n T-shirt, dan vou jy hom. Dan sit jy hom on die boude, Dan vat jy 'n Shoprite sakkie bo-oor' (you take a T-shirt, then you fold it. Then you cover the bum. Then you tie a Shoprite bag over it. FG: Jeslyn, p. 24, line 28).

This agency in some regards often left them feeling exhausted and like failures because *'nou worry ek oor wat eek my kind vanaand'* (Now I worry about what my child will eat tonight. FG: Kiah, p. 5 line 43). For some of them, the SASSA grant money helped them to protect their children from starvation. Despite having 'piece jobs' from time to time, Shandre shared that she hoped people understood that she, like other mothers,

'het gesukkel met werk. Ek sukkel even vandag nog om werk te kry. En ek het 'n char gekry, huisskoonmaak twee dae. En daai twee dae se geld moes ek gebruik het om my kind se crèche geld te betaal. En dan moet ek sy SASSA vat om vir ons aan die lewe te hou en ek moet skuldjies maak hier en daar.' (struggled with work. I'm still struggling to find work today. And I got 'n char, house cleaning two days. And that two days' money I paid my child's crèche money. And then I

have to take his SASSA to keep us alive and I have to make debts here and there. I: Shandre, p. 5, line 7).

According to the co-researchers, whilst some of their families might want to support them, it was just too much for their families to take care of a new baby as well. A new addition to the family, especially one from an underprivileged background, often exacerbates the already dire financial strain. According to Kiah her family felt overwhelmed because *'it was like, now we must feed this child, all those types of things.'* (I: Kiah, p. 3, line 16). This becomes even more difficult when their mother/father or guardian is also a single parent.

The women participating in the study felt it was important for others to know that growing up with little financial freedom, which often leads to a lack of proper housing, limited food and a reliance on the Government grant money created increased vulnerability to engaging with negative peer groups and violence.

4.4.3.1.2 *Negative peer group and community violence.*

Negative peer groups and community violence are often seen in marginalised communities (Arnett, 2005; Smith et al., 2014; Gaete & Araya, 2017). For the women in Ukomelela, peer pressure was ever-present as there was an ongoing need to belong. According to the women, it was not just about being part of any group. They felt that many young people in the community usually want to share in specific groups who have influence in the community. Not every young person was interested in having good role models, but rather wanted to engage in 'fun'. Fun often related to engaging in risky behaviour, according to Kiah and others, young people:

'They drink. They drink. [laughs] They drink, and they make babies, and they use drugs and they do housebreaking. That's what they do for fun. They fight.' (I: Kiah, p. 4, line 24).

This was echoed by the other women who said that at weekends women in the community dress up and go to the taverns to party and drink.

The co-researchers were of the opinion that the community lacks activities to occupy the youth constructively. Many of the adults in the community are also seen to be engaging in unhealthy activities. Two of the co-researchers think that because of this, many adolescents seem to lack respect for adults within the community. Wanda shared that it was upsetting to witness how some young people *'vloek sommer die grootmense of soek onnodig skoor'* (just curse the adults or look for unnecessary trouble. I: Wanda, p. 1, line 16).

Community violence, especially within the home, was also a great concern and, according to the

women, violence often went hand in hand with negative peer pressure or destructive relationships. Not all the women in the study were comfortable discussing too much regarding violence and the way it influenced their lives. However, it was apparent that exposure to violence played a significant role in the lives of people in Ukomelela and that this aspect was part of understanding a holistic picture of the co-researchers' lived realities. One such co-researcher, Jeslyn, had had a particularly violent upbringing within the home environment. She did not feel comfortable sharing too much information about domestic violence within the focus group but briefly shared in the individual River of Life activity that

'ek het grootgeraak met geweld. Ek moes toekyk hoe my ma en my pa baklei en hoe sy gesteeek word.' (I grew up with violence. I had to see how my mom and dad fought and how she got stabbed. I: Jeslyn, p. 2, line 13).

Other women, however, felt that it was important for the co-researchers who were comfortable, to share their experiences regarding domestic and gender-based violence. According to them, substance abuse was often a common trigger for these acts of violence. Wanda voiced that violence in the home is not an uncommon phenomenon in Ukomelela. She witnessed *'my pa het baie my ma geslaan'* (My dad hit my mom a lot. FG: Wanda, p. 14, line 34) and came to understand at an early age that often women and men *'het baie gedrink'* (drank a lot. FG, Wanda, p. 14, line 39; FG, Shandre, p. 14, line 40).

The co-researchers further mentioned that many families in the community had lost their children owing to substance abuse, illegal activities, and violence. One of the co-researchers mentioned that

'Hulle is nog nie eens 21 jaar, dan verloor hulle al klaar hulle lewens by die smokkelhuise' (They are not even 21 years old yet, then they have already lost their lives at the Shebeens. I: Wanda, p. 2, line 12).

Not only are the women afraid of their children engaging in risky behaviour as they grow older, but they are also concerned for the safety and well-being of their children from very young ages. Shandre, like many of the other women, spoke of her fears for the safety of her child within the community because

'kinders word verkrag en hulle word doodgemaak' (Children are raped and murdered. I: Shandre, p. 15, line 32).

Over and above the challenges in the community, many of the co-researchers further mentioned that they often became involved in romantic relationships with men who were actively involved in crime and drug abuse. Like many of the women in the study, Shandre elaborated on the reason she got involved with a drug-user:

'Hy was een wat drugs gebruik het, maar al het hy drugs gebruik, hy het vir my die attention gegee. Hy het my daai liefde gegee wat ek nooit gekry het nie.' (He was one who used drugs,

but even though he used drugs, he gave me the attention. He gave me that love I never got. I: Shandre, p. 3, line 31).

Additionally, the women in the group also confessed their own involvement in drugs and alcohol. During the focus group discussions, the co-researchers mentioned

'I would just join any group that was drinking and drink with them. I used to like fighting and arguing. I was very short-tempered.' (FG, Kiah, p. 13, line 15).

Jeslyn added, *'Yes, yes. Ek was ook lief vir rondloop, hier by die smokkelhuise. [Lag] Maar ek het nie baie, ek het gedrink, maar net nou en dan, maar nie altyd nie.'* (Yes, yes. I also loved walking around, here at the Shebeens. [Laughs] But I did not drink much, I drank, but

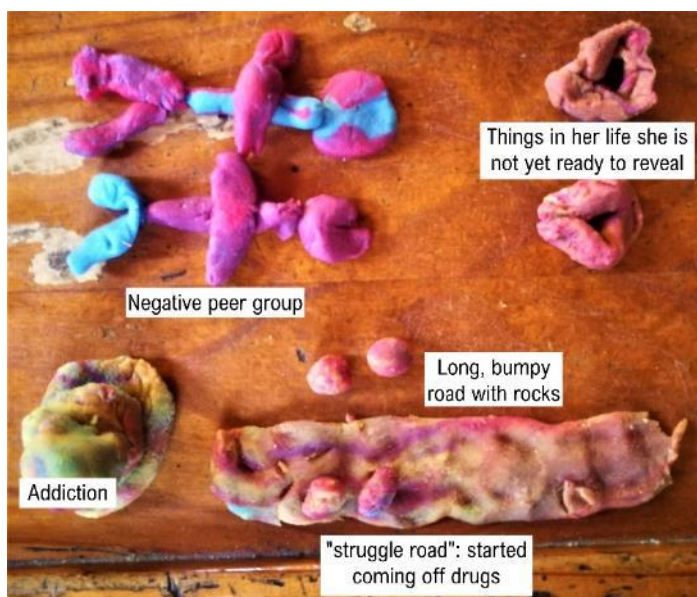


Figure 4.10 Jeslyn's clay model (Source: Author)

only now and then, but not always. FG, Jeslyn, p. 13, line 21; See Figure 4.11). Wanda further revealed that just after the birth of her child, she went to rehab to get her life back on track.

As is evident from the extracts above, negative peer groups, involvement in drug and alcohol abuse, as well as community violence were some of the pertinent points raised by the women in the study. The co-researchers elaborated on their own experiences with the above factors, the impact these have had on their lives, and the associated stigma. Fear of stigma meant that many of the women, while acknowledging that there were multiple complex challenges in their lives, were not able to share fully during the research conversations. Adopting an ethical research stance assisted me in reminding all of us to honour everyone's right to privacy.

4.4.3.1.3 Stigmatisation.

Early motherhood is often associated with negative consequences for the mother, child, and greater community. Owing to this there is a stigma attached to having a child at an early age (Cook & Cameron, 2015; Jones et al., 2019). Many of the women disclosed that, at the time of their first pregnancy, they did not use any contraceptive methods. The co-researchers made reference to the negative side-effects of hormonal contraceptives. Some of those mentioned included weight gain, tiredness, interrupted menstruation cycle, nausea, laziness, and moodiness. For them, these side-effects were a major

deterrent to using protection. Another major reason for the lack of contraceptive use, was the societal stigma associated with going to the clinic to obtain female contraceptives, such as the injection or monthly pill. It was evident from the women's views that girls did not want to visit the clinic as they wanted to keep their sexual relationships private. In their view, by going to the clinic you,

'maak vir hulle bewus dat jy nou al in daai stage wat jy saam slaap met 'n man' (Make them aware that you are in the stage where you are sleeping with a man. I: Shandre, p. 10, line 38).

In addition, Andrea identified the fear the community members have of staff at the clinic gossiping about them and oftentimes lacking compassion in the way they dealt with sexual health education with adolescents.

The co-researchers also said that whilst men and women were aware that condoms are readily available, in their experience, men often choose not to use them and intimidate their partners by insisting on having sex without them. The reason the youth do not want to wear condoms, is what the women refer to as the *'skin to skin'* effect (I: Shandre, p. 10, line 12), which is a machismo attitude related to the best type of sex, shared among young and older men. This stigma related to the use of contraceptives appears to be a major deterrent to safe sex in Ukomelela and, from the conversations, they are significant factors associated with teenage pregnancy.

4.4.3.2 Teenage pregnancy.

Teenage pregnancy is a common occurrence within the community. It is complex, and parenthood is often associated with younger single mothers, with children from different fathers, and with no income. As we explored the phenomenon of teenage pregnancy, the lack of sexual education, parental involvement and support emerged as significant subthemes and will therefore be discussed below. In addition, the children's fathers and their role in the lives of women and children will be a key factor shared in this section.

4.4.3.2.1 Lack of education, parental involvement, and support.

A clear pattern appeared in the women's' narrative responses, indicating a lack of sexual education, deficient parental involvement, and absence of support within the community.

The women disclosed that they knew little about sex, pregnancy, and birth before having gone through it themselves. According to the co-researchers, they learnt the basics regarding biological sexual reproduction from school but lacked parental involvement and open discussions from their parents about this topic. Sexual reproductive education at school was focused on how some of the biological

factors relate to aspects that Rushay mentioned: 'you know mos, like LO, like how the penis is and how all this stuff.' (I: Rushay, p. 6, line 29).

According to the co-researchers that is about how far it went. They thought that the sexual education they received at school did not fully prepare them for birth, as Kiah elaborated:

'Toe ek hospitaal toe gaan en ek het pyne en toe sien ek die suster druk haar vingers in my. Toe dink ek, nou hoekom druk die suster dan nou haar vingers in my koekeloek [vagina]. Gaan hulle nie die kind uit my maag uithaal nie? Ek was confused. Niemand het vir my gesê nie' (When I went to the hospital, and had pains, and then I saw the sister press her fingers into me. Then I thought, now why is the sister pressing her fingers into my [vagina]. Are they not going to take the child out of my tummy? I was confused. Nobody told me. FG: Kiah, p. 34, line 42).

Having sexual education at school was clearly not enough. According to the women, what they really needed was honest and open conversations regarding sex, sexuality, decision-making, and self-worth from their parents and educators. When asked whose responsibility it was to educate the youth, the women agreed that the obligation lies with parents since *'it's your parents. They need to talk about it.'* (I: Rushay, p. 6, line 48). Shandre added to this by stating that parents need to open up about their own lived realities when it comes to sexual discussions:

'Dit word gesê by die clinic, dra 'n kondoom. Maar ons wil nie daar wees nie. Ons wil hê mammie moet sê, ons wil hê daddy moet sê. Daddy het 'n storie. Mammie het 'n storie. Deel jou storie met my, sodat ek kan vir my voorberei vir vorentoe.' (It is said at the clinic, wear a condom. But we do not want to be there [at the clinic]. We want mommy to say, we want daddy to say. Daddy has a story. Mommy has a story. Share your story with me so that I can prepare myself for the future. I: Shandre, p. 8, line 38).

Andrea and Jeslyn emphasised the involvement of parents but added that it should be a collaborative effort involving schools and teachers as well, mentioning that

'tienaers moet ook verantwoordelikheid vat' (teenagers must also take responsibility. I: Andrea, p. 5, line 49).

Teenagers have access to information and need to accept responsibility for obtaining that information as well. For Wanda, talking about sex at home was remarkably difficult and she voiced that as a single parent, her father probably did not feel comfortable discussing the topic with his daughter.

In addition to the above, Jeslyn described her conversations with her mother before her passing as including advice and guidance but that the conversation was often more authoritarian than bi-directional. She voiced:

'Ons het openlik daaroor gepraat, maar sy het nog nie much vir my gevra, doen ek al dit en doen ek daai nie, maar sy het my bewus gemaak van die jongens [mans] wat jou kan gebruik. Moenie jou bene oopmaak vir enige jong [man] nie en gebruik 'n kondoom.' (We talked openly about it, but she didn't ask me much, do I do this, and do I do that, but she made me aware of the boys who can use you. Do not open your legs to any young man and use a condom. I: Jeslyn, p. 2, line 21).

Another co-researcher had a similar experience to Jeslyn and expressed that her mother did not ever take the time to sit her down and discuss values and morals; yet, when she stepped over the line, punishment was soon to follow,

'My ma het nooit daarvan gepraat met my. Dit was net as ek iets verkeerd gedoen het, dan het ek pak gekry.' (My mom never talked to me about it. It was just when I did something wrong, then I got a hiding. I: Andrea, p. 2, line 49).

In a community rife with poverty, many families live in small, enclosed rooms. One of the co-researchers mentioned that for her, she learnt about sex by seeing it happen and doing it herself. All the co-researchers had similar experiences regarding sex. With little education and knowledge about sex, the women in the group learnt about it from experimentation. For them, this experimentation was enjoyable and made them feel good, but the consequences were not considered until it was too late as Rushay stated that *'I just do it for fun, and ja, then the results were pregnancy.'* (I: Rushay, p. 6, line 18).

A lack of parental support was clearly indicated by the co-researchers' lived experiences. Andrea, like many of the women in the study, communicated that had her parents been more involved and communicated openly and honestly about sex, her choices in life might have been vastly different. She voiced this by saying: *'As my ma meer betrokke gewees het in my*



Figure 4.11 Extract from Wanda's collage (Source: Author)

lewe, dan sou, ek glo dan sou dinge anders gewees het vandag.' (If my mother had been more involved in my life, then, I believe, things would have been different today. I: Andrea, p. 3, line 9). During quite an emotional conversation, Wanda spoke about how her parents used to threaten her and her sister by withholding food as a form of discipline. According to the co-researchers, the harsh reality of poverty mixed with uninvolved parents created environments lacking love, care, and support. This often made them more vulnerable to relationships with men who initially appeared to 'give them what they needed'. An extract from one of the women explored this phenomenon in detail:

'Jy vind iets wat jy nie in die huis kry nie. [...] maar hy gaan vir jou spesiaal laat voel. [...] en hy laat vir jou gemaklik voel, comfortable voel en hy laat vir jou loveable voel, goed voel oor jouself.'
(You find something you do not find in the house. [...] but he's going to make you feel special. [...] and he makes you feel comfortable, comfortable and he makes you feel loveable, feel good about yourself. I: Shandre, p. 8, line 2).

Another pertinent view regarding teenage pregnancy and parental involvement related to perceptions of a lack of good, supportive, and reliable father figures in their lives. They either grew up with absent fathers or, if their fathers were present in their lives, their presence was usually accompanied by violence. This created confusion, as some of them sought a father figure whom they hoped could instil good morals and values. However, for Shandre, *'ek het nie geweet wat is reg en wat is verkeerd nie'* (I did not know what was right and what was wrong. I: Shandre, p. 8, line 22). She further elaborated that, in her opinion, a good upbringing and the involvement of both parents are needed to develop holistically.

Reflecting on the women's lived realities, it was apparent that parental support can make a massive difference in the lives of young girls, as Kiah stated, *'I wanted someone to reach out.'* (I: Kiah, p. 11, line 12). Sadly, according to the women, the women in Ukomelela were often seeking and not finding love and care at home. In the end, they sought it elsewhere, mostly in the arms of a young man, who might also be seeking similar affection.

4.4.3.2.2. *The child's father.*

The expression *'It takes two to tango'* is often used when both parties involved in a challenging situation must accept equal responsibility. According to the women who participated in the study, making and raising a child requires both a mother and a father. Yet, they voiced that girls are often the ones more deeply affected by teenage pregnancy. The co-researchers shared that, in their view, many of the fathers often continued with their lives as if nothing significant had happened.

For all the co-researchers, the lack of planning for becoming pregnant was overwhelming. The fathers often reacted with disbelief and, according to the women, the men's initial reaction was to get away from

the situation. It was evident in the stories of the co-researchers that most of the fathers abandoned them after they heard about the news of an unplanned pregnancy.

'He left me. He walked out. He left and he dated someone within around here in the neighbourhood and, ja. And that was just it.' (I: Kiah, p. 8, line 12).

Rushay had a similar encounter with the father of her unborn child. When she shared the news with him, *'that is the time he just ran away.'* (I: Rushay, p. 3, line 35). However, not all the men responded the same way. For one of them, upon hearing the news of her pregnancy, he was *'uit sy vel uit'* (extremely excited. I: Jeslyn, p. 4, line 34). However, for all of the fathers, as the reality hit them, the excitement, quickly faded and they abandoned the mother and child without warning. For Wanda, the abandonment occurred simultaneously with the discovery of her child's father's infidelity. Wanda elaborated further on her lived experience as a single mother, that soon after finding out that she was a month pregnant, the father of her child was arrested and spent two years in prison. Also, having a partner in prison meant that he could not support them financially or emotionally.

This abandonment by the fathers was, in some of the cases, only a temporary occurrence, and the fathers eventually returned. Rushay mentioned that her child's father returned after four years of being absent from their lives and he was *'sorry for all these years he was not in the child's life.'* (I: Rushay, p. 8, line 6). She mentioned that he is currently providing for their child.

Reflecting on the absenteeism of the fathers, many of the co-researchers voiced that had they had the support of the child's father, their life's trajectory might have been different. One co-researcher, in particular, said that, having to cope alone with her child resulted in her use of alcohol as a coping mechanism. Overwhelming feelings of loneliness and isolation were common themes that, according to the women, led to feelings of despondency about their futures.

4.4.3.2.3 *Despondent outcomes.*

As is evident in the narratives, the women in the study often mentioned despondent outcomes when speaking about their schooling and future employment. The literature states that early motherhood has negative consequences on school attendance and educational attainment (Cook & Cameron, 2015; Timæus & Moultrie, 2015). All of the women in the study left school owing to their pregnancy, as they often felt ashamed and feared aspersions might be cast upon them. One of the co-researchers voiced that she

'needed to quit school, because for me it was like, what is the kids going to say at school and all this stuff. My friends they are going to laugh at me. So, I just quit.' (I: Rushay, p. 3, line 9).

The co-researchers further voiced a desire to complete their schooling careers, but stated that in their younger years, it was not that easy to return. Their inability to complete their schooling had had a detrimental effect on their ability to access permanent employment.

The lack of a stable job and income not only has negative effects on the women, but on the economy of the community as well. The women mentioned that they felt abandoned by the community leaders, who do not seem to listen to their concerns. A good example that illustrates the majority of the responses about the women's' perceptions around this subtheme is summed up by Kiah when she said that

'nothing good ever happens here in the community. [...] We feel like we don't have leaders [...] We feel that nobody is listening to the voices of the people.' (I: Kiah, p. 5, line 7).

According to the women, their community leaders are not implementing noteworthy changes required by the members. Furthermore, the members in Ukomelela not only feel unheard by their own leaders, but also abandoned by their nearby communities, as Jeslyn stated:

'Ek dink nie hulle worry oor die mense hier nie, want dis meestal mense in ver plekke wat die goed hier kom uitdeel en vir die kinders besig hou of speletjies hou en so. So ek dink nie hulle gee om oor ons nie' (I don't think they worry about the people here, because it's mostly people from faraway places who come to hand out the goods here and keep the children busy or play games and such. So I do not think they care about us at all. I: Jeslyn, p. 2, line 38).

4.4.3.3 Positive factors.

Despite all the negative aspects in the community, the co-researchers still saw the beauty in the environment, and the hope in the community. Ukomelela has numerous encouraging aspects that, according to the women, just require some attention to foster a more positive environment for the community members.

The co-researchers identified safe outdoor spaces as a need in the community. Sponsors often visited Ukomelela to do youth outreaches and to engage the children in activities such as dancing and playing games. Wanda added further positive aspects of the outreaches by saying:

'dan kry hulle die einde van die jaar presente. Hulle het ook koskombuise wat vir die kinders miskien elke dag kos gee of pap' (Then at the end of the year they get presents. They also have soup kitchens that maybe give the children food or porridge every day. I: Wanda, p. 1, line 47).

Competitions are also held as part of these programmes to make them more enjoyable, and children win prizes as a result. Jeslyn, however, mentioned that this frequently led to quarrels among community members relating to the distribution of goods,

'Daai kry 'n hemp, maar ons het nog nie gekry nie. Hulle het al twee keer gekry. Ja, wat van ons wat nog nie gekry het nie?' (That one gets a shirt, but we have not got one yet. They've gotten twice already. Yes, what about those of us who have not yet received anything yet? I: Jeslyn, p. 2, line 13).

However thoughtful and positive these campaigns are, according to the women, they are only a short-term solution, as Andrea declared:

'Daar is mense wat kom en probeer help en so aan, maar op die einde van die dag, dan eindig dit ook maar net so en is hulle maar net weer terug daar wat hulle gewees het.' (There are people who come and try to help and so on, but at the end of the day, then it also ends just like that, and they are just back there where they were. I: Andrea, p. 1, line 13).

Thus, the women agreed that change was required from inside the community. The members of Ukomelela needed to stand together to make effective and lasting changes in the community. One of the women mentioned that there were now parks in the community for the children to play, something they did not really have as kids:

'We didn't have it, but they have it now. So the kids can basically just run around at the park.' (I: Kiah, p. 4, line 31).

Unfortunately, it was mentioned that adults also make use of these parks for their own negative recreational activities. Kiah stated that the adults often take

'their case of beers and stuff and they go drink at the park. And they break the bottles there and the children cut their feet.' (I: Kiah, p. 4, line 39).

The women in the group corroborated these statements but mentioned that this is an area of growth that the community needs to take charge of.

Even amid chaos, poverty and numerous other negative aspects in the community, the women spoke of Ukomelela with such positivity. One of the women added,

'Dit is 'n baie goeie gemeenskap' (It is a very good community. I: Shandre, p. 16, line 27), while another mentioned that for her the community was

'so quiet and it's a beautiful village. Like I see beauty. We're surrounded by beautiful trees, you know, the mountains, the railway.' (I: Kiah, p. 5, line 49).

4.4.4 Resilience

Resilience was described by one of the co-researchers as *'not succumbing to your circumstances'* (I: Kiah, p. 10, line 34). For the women in the research study, a sense of resilience and empowerment accompanied their lived realities. Through this process, they connected with their agency by enabling

themselves to voice their own meaning-making processes and the significance that these processes had on their understanding of themselves as mothers. Resilience was, however, not something that just occurred in solitude, but various factors throughout their journeys played a significant role in emphasising their resilience. The women explored the role that the support of others played during their experience of early motherhood. Most of the co-researchers mentioned a religious awareness that enabled them to feel comforted and protected at their most vulnerable times. Additionally, the women voiced their own empowerment through their lived experience and how this led to growth and the ability to know their own worth. The co-researchers voiced that during this study they had embarked on a powerful retrospective journey that enabled them to look back at their own meaning-making processes. Below are the themes and subthemes discussed in this category:

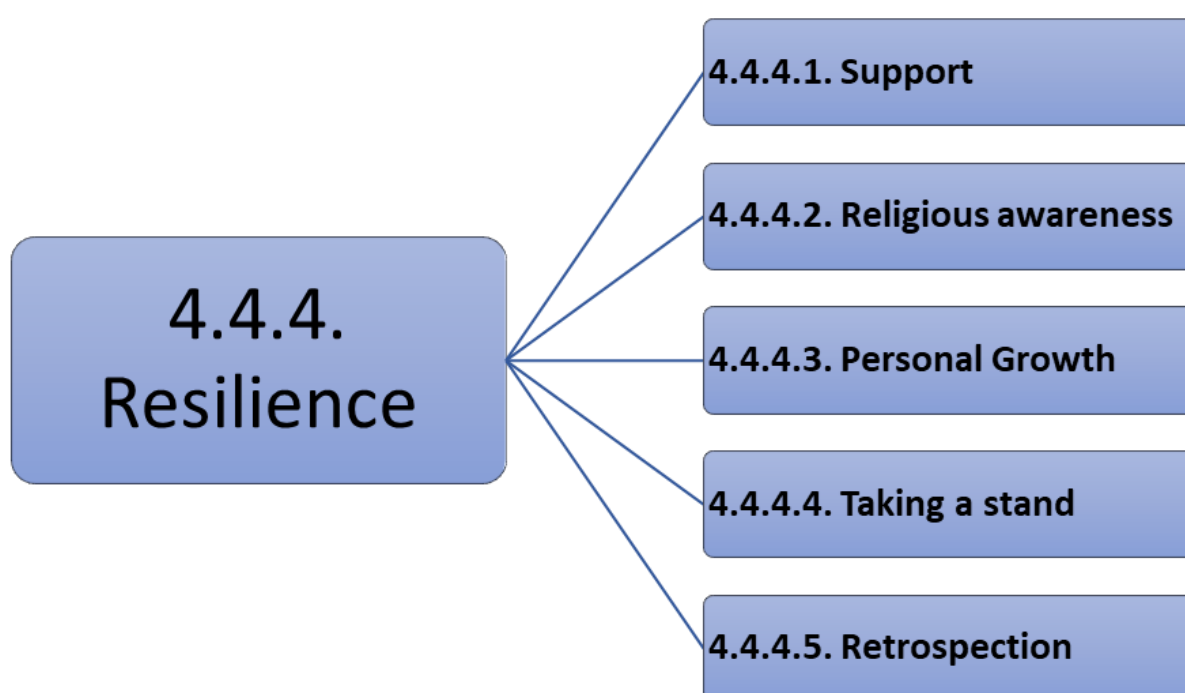


Figure 4.12 Category Four: Resilience (Source: Author)

4.4.4.1 Support.

Support enables us to feel protected and comforted. For the co-researchers, support meant that someone was on this journey with them and that someone was on their side. They voiced that support was an integral part of transitioning into early motherhood.

Each of the co-researchers mentioned the supportive involvement of a significant person. Rushay was the only woman in the study to mention that her mother was that figure in her life. All the other women did not make mention of their mothers as a strong supportive presence during early motherhood. Having

both lost their mothers prior to falling pregnant, Wanda and Jeslyn mentioned that for them, their mothers were noteworthy figures prior to their deaths, as Jeslyn described,

'maar sy was 'n sterk vroumens en ek het dit by haar gekry.' (She was a strong woman and I got it from her. I: Jeslyn, p. 9, line 2).

Jeslyn further mentioned that during her pregnancy only her aunt was seen as a supportive figure in her life. When the cravings hit, her aunt was the one who made a plan to source foods and even enquired about how she slept at night. Her aunt made sure she drank her medication and took her to her doctor's appointments. Jeslyn's own father was absent in her and her child's lives until the little girl started Grade R, then he *'het vir my baie gehelp met haar'* (helped me a lot with her. I: Jeslyn, p. 3, line 23). Many of the co-researchers further mentioned the support of aunts in their lives. Kiah elaborated that on one occasion there was hardly food in the house and, without even knowing this, her aunt arrived at the door with a *'sak meliemeel, 'n sak koekmeel, vleis, en visolie'* (bag of mealie meal, a bag of flour, meat, and fish oil. FG: Kiah, p. 6, line 27).

Unfortunately, throughout the discussions, it was also evident that *'not all of us are equally blessed to have people around us'* (I: Kiah, p. 16, line 2). The women elaborated that it was often friends or other relatives who showed support instead of their own parents. Rushay and Shandre both said that the child's father's family brought food and clothing items to them as a form of financial support during their pregnancy. Andrea felt supported by her grandmother and a friend who was also pregnant at that time. Similarly, Shandre mentioned that one of her friends was her strength during early motherhood because *'ek kon altyd op haar staatmaak'* (I could always depend on her. I: Shandre, p. 6, line 29). Wanda further noted that having an older sister who had already given birth was a big support for her because *'sy weet mos nou wat om te doen'* (she knew what to do. I: Wanda, p. 4, line 21).

From the extracts above it is evident that support, in all its various forms, plays a vital role in early motherhood. This is not merely done for financial reasons but contributes to mental well-being during pregnancy as well.

4.4.4.2 Religious awareness.

All of the women in the study mentioned that, at some point in time, they were left to their own devices, and needed to be completely self-reliant. They expressed that these times were extremely detrimental to their mental well-being. The co-researchers, however, found hope in their own religious awareness.

The women often voiced desperation and hopelessness during their journeys. When asked how they got themselves out of that pit of despair, one of the co-researchers stated, 'die Here' (the Lord) (FG: Kiah, p. 4, line 34). The others agreed that for each of them, religion played a key role culminating in resilience, personal growth, and empowerment. Ellen depicted her journey with religion in her clay model (Figure 4.13) and described how Jesus holds and protects her. She further mentioned how she is on a journey to be covered in gold, but the ball is not covered completely yet. She still has areas to work on.



Figure 4.13: Ellen's clay model (Source: Author)

Most of the women reflected that as young girls they grew up in dire circumstances, often with little love and acceptance in the home environment. According to them, they felt unworthy of love, and it was only when their religious relationship with Jesus grew, that they knew what true love and acceptance were all about. An extract that illustrates the women's perceptions about religion and their relationship with Jesus in a profound manner, was stated by Kiah when she said:

'And when He came, He loved her so much, that she had no choice but to love herself. And to know her worth and He just printed into her head that no matter what you've done, no matter what you've been through, no matter how people see you, there is beauty inside of you.' (FG: Kiah, p. 10, line 24).

These sentiments were echoed by Shandre during her online individual interview when she discussed suicidal thoughts, and how the promises in the Bible helped her gain perspective,

'maar dan kom daar altyd 'n manier wat die Bybel oor my kom, dan sal ek maar heeldag lees. Vir my om self beter te voel oor myself.' (But then there comes a time when the Bible comes over me, then I will just read all day. For me to feel better about myself. I: Shandre, p. 7, line 25).

Additionally, co-researchers were of the view that, in the Bible, God has beautiful promises and verses pertaining to His view of people and His love for people, such as

'Jy is mooi. Jy is meer as 'n oorwinnaar. Ek het vir jou mooi dinge. My planne vir jou is mooi.' (You are beautiful. You are more than a conqueror. I have wonderful things for you. My plans for you are lovely. FG: Jeslyn, p. 7 line 9).

According to the women, their view of themselves changed when they started engaging in church and Bible reading activities with fellow believers, as Shandre stated:

'die een ding wat my aan die gang hou is dat God is lief vir my. Hy het my daai krag gegee om aan te gaan elke dag' (The one thing that keeps me going is that God loves me. He gave me that strength to go on every day. I: Shandre, p. 5, line 48).

One of the other co-researchers further contributed to the influence of religion when she mentioned how alone she felt, while sleeping on the streets, but

'die Here het my gebed verhoor.' (The Lord heard my prayer. I: Wanda, p. 7, line 8).

After a long wait, she finally bought her own house in Ukomelela after she prayed

'elke liewe dag en die Here gevra om vir my te help, want ek kan nie so aangaan nie' (every day and asked the Lord to help me, because I cannot go on like this. I: Wanda, p. 7, line 12).

This theme was concerned with gaining an understanding of the influence of religion on the co-researchers' meaning-making. From the extracts, it is evident that religion played a vital role in the women's lives, but agency is also required, as Kiah put it,

'God is met jou, maar dit begin by jousef ook. As jy iets het om voor te lewe, dan basies dan ruk jy jousef bymekaar.' (God is with you, but it starts with yourself too. If you have something to live for, then basically you'll pull yourself together. FG: Kiah, p. 4, line 40).

4.4.4.3 Personal growth.

Personal growth occurs throughout life if one is willing to learn from experiences that often seem to test our innermost strengths. Early motherhood can be seen as one of those experiences in life that come about so suddenly, without any planning, and has the power to affect every aspect of a young girl's life. The women in the study all experienced this unanticipated change. However, they all expressed personal growth and a sense of empowerment as a result. One of the co-researchers voiced that having to be independent and going through these difficult circumstances alone, helped to enhance her resilience because *'everything we need is within ourselves'* (I: Kiah, p. 12, line 23).

A clear pattern emerged from the women's narrative responses, indicating their understanding of the influence that adversity had on their resilience and on who they are today. One of the co-researchers indicated how becoming a mother had had a powerful impact on her life by stating:

'My kind het my gehelp, want ek kon nie net dink vir myself nie. Ek het nou iemand wat nou my verantwoordelikheid gaan wees' (My child helped me, because I could not just think of myself. I now have someone who will be my responsibility. I: Shandre, p. 17, line 28).

This was reiterated by many of the women when they mentioned that, in retrospect, becoming a mother had had a positive effect on their becoming a better person, because

'ons weet dit is nie maklik nie, maar jy kan.' (We know it isn't easy, but you can. FG: Kiah, p. 2, line 23).

According to the women in the study, their lived experience of adversity and marginalisation had culminated in resilience. One co-researcher emphasised this by stating:

'ek kom al deur baie dinge. Ek was al op die punt om verkrag te word het. Ek was al amper doodgemaak gewees en ek is deur al daai tipe van dinge. So ek sou myself beskryf as resilient.' (I've been through a lot of things. I have already been about to be raped. I was almost killed, and I went through all those kinds of things. So, I would describe myself as resilient. I: Andrea, p. 5, line 25).

During their creative arts-based individual interview activity, many of the women spoke about their personal growth. They often mentioned that they were thankful for their struggles as *'the calm part means to me like that I learned a lot in life. It makes me the person I am today. The person like I am today is for what I did go through in life'* (I: Rushay, p. 13, line 48).

Wanda explored a similar theme in her River of Life, *'Ek het deur 'n klomp dinge gekom wat baie moeilik was. Maar ek is deur. Ek is deur. Ek weet wat is dit om so 'n swaar lewe deur te maak maar ek het daardeur gekom.'* (I came through a lot of things that were very difficult. But I'm through. I'm through. I know what it's like to go through such a difficult life, but I got through it. I: Wanda, p. 8, line 4). Wanda depicted this journey in her clay model (Figure 4.14).



Figure 4.14: Wanda's clay model (Source: Author)

From the discussions above, it is evident that the women used their lived experiences as a way of learning and growing to become the people they feel they were meant to be. It is, however, not always an easy road and it takes a lot of courage, as Shandre mentions:

'sometimes praat ek vir myself ook moed in om hoop te het vir die lewe.' (Sometimes, I also need to encourage myself to have hope in life. FG: Shandre, p. 5, line 36).

In addition, Jeslyn mentioned that you should not let things get you down during this journey of self-discovery,

'Ek weet dat ek baie sterk is en niks sal vir my so gou onderkry nie.' (I know I am very strong, and nothing will get me down. I: Jeslyn, p. 10, line 15).

The women in the study allowed themselves to be transformed by their own outlooks on life, as Kiah stated,

'Life is beautiful when you know who you are and you have things that you stand for and when you start to know how to make the right choices' (I: Kiah, p. 14, line 13).

4.4.4.4 Taking a stand.

When one encounters a situation that had the ability to change the trajectory of one's life, it is vital to take a stand and to be an active agent of change. The women in the study voiced their own needs as young mothers and how things could have been different for them. It was therefore important for the co-researchers to share their lived experience with other young girls, parents, and the greater community.

All of the co-researchers had the same perception towards the fact that they wanted to do better for their own children. They strove to become better, more loving mothers, who provided stability and security for their children. They wanted to provide home environments that they had lacked as children. This was beautifully illustrated in a comment by Shandre:

'Die een ding wat ek wens is 'n stabiele huis met liefde. Om skool te voltooi maar die eerste en die belangrikste is 'n huis met liefde waar ek sal vir hom liefde en alles gee. Dit is iets wat ek nooit gekry het nie. Maar daai is die tipe ma wat ek vir hom wil wees. 'n Ma wat ten alle tye daar is, ondersteuning, aandag, liefde. Vir hom leer van die reg en verkeerd. Vir hom help as hy vashaak. Dit is iets wat ek sal begeer om vir hom te doen.' (The one thing I wish for is a stable home with love. To finish school, but the first and most important is a house with love where I will give him love and everything. This is something I never got. But that's the type of mom I want to be for him. A mom who is there at all times, support, attention, love. To teach him right from wrong. Help him if he gets stuck. This is something I would desire to do for him. I: Shandre, p. 6).

Furthermore, the women expressed a need to engage with young girls in similar situations as them and to give them a space to express their thoughts and feelings openly. Additionally, the co-researchers related how their unwise decision-making was influenced by a lack of self-worth, and they mentioned how empowering it would be to the youth if they are taught their worth:

'If we can teach the girls their worth and once they know their worth, they will know exactly what they deserve and they won't compromise or settle for anything other than that which they believe they deserve.' (I: Kiah, p. 6, line 49).

The women further voiced how, during adolescence, they felt isolated and as if no one understood what they were going through. But according to the women, they want young girls to know that *'ons verstaan want ons was daar'* (We understand, because we were there. FG: Kiah, p. 2, line 28). Rushay elaborated that she would love to give back to the community by engaging in conversation with other young women, who have *'gone through the same thing I did go through'* (I: Rushay, p. 13, line 50). Another co-researcher was particularly enthralled by the idea of working with the youth. She expressed how she often engages with them and

'praat altyd met hulle. So vir my is dit, hulle kan enige tyd op my staatmaak. Ek is altyd vir hulle daar vir raad. Help altyd met hulle probleme.' (Always talk to them. So for me it is, they can rely on me at any time. I am always there for them for advice. Always help with their problems. I: Shandre, p. 16, line 39).

With regard to early motherhood, Jeslyn mentioned that it is futile to tell the youth not to have sex, but that education about safe sex is vital. Wanda shared a similar thought by stating

'ek wil vir hulle aanmoedig om die regte pad te stap. Dit is nie nodig om in so 'n lewe te lewe nie. Dis baie swaar. Dis beter om die jong meisies te aanmoedig. Daai is die regte pad.' (I want to encourage them to walk the right path. It is not necessary to live such a life. It's very hard. It's better to encourage the young girls. That's the right path. I: Wanda, p. 7, line 29).

Within the greater community, the women expressed having a more significant purpose in Ukomelela to initiate change from within (for more information, see section 4.4.3.3. in which the women expressed the changes they felt the community needs). As with all of the women in the group, Shandre mentioned that for her a great need within the community is a soup kitchen and a shelter to provide for the poor. She further expressed the need for a great initiative that would engage old and young in the community. Shandre explained:

'ek wil vir oumense wat by die huise sit purpose gee deur om die jongspanne te leer hoe om naaldwerk te doen.' (I want to give the old people who sit at home a purpose through teaching the youngsters how to do sewing. I: Shandre, p. 16, line 40).

Within the group of the women, they expressed a deep sense of needing to give back to the community and make it a better place for their own children.

The discussion above demonstrated a need to give back to the community of Ukomelela. The women expressed the desire to be active agents of change, even when life might have dealt them some

questionable cards. During her River of Life activity, Kiah mentioned something powerful about early motherhood and taking control of one's own life trajectory, by voicing that

'there is life after this and we can hold hands through the whole process; we can see a young woman rise up again. She can become who she is supposed to be.' (I: Kiah, p. 14, line 28).

4.4.4.5 Retrospection.

This study allowed the co-researchers to revisit their rich lived realities to engage retrospectively with early motherhood, identity, and resilience. Creative arts-based methods were used to elicit information and to open a platform for discussion. The women in the study mentioned how the revisiting made them reflect on how far they had come and on what they had accomplished.

The women expressed a deep gratitude to the process as they reflected on the meaning-making during the journey. Rushay reflected that

'as a child like you go through a lot of stuff and then you grow up and all those kind of stuff, like it's staying inside, inside you' (I: Rushay, p. 5, line 2).

Many of the co-researchers stated that before the study, they had never voiced their experiences aloud. Rushay further mentioned that

'I even feel relieved now that I talked to someone about my past. Sometimes it's not easy to talk to anyone about your past. You just keep it for yourself.' (I: Rushay, p. 15, line 3).

One of the co-researchers, Andrea, became very emotional during parts of the online individual interview. I needed to use my Rogerian therapeutic skills of empathic listening and unconditional positive regard to make her feel heard and to create a safe online space. When asked about the reason for her emotional response, she informed me that

'dis die eerste keer wat ek daaroor praat. Ek het nog nooit daaroor gepraat nie. Ek praat nooit oor my gevoelens nie. So ek dink dit help baie om te praat oor hoe 'n mens voel. 'n Mens moet nou en dan 'n bietjie uitlaat.' (This is the first time I have talked about it. I've never talked about it before. I never talk about my feelings. So, I think it helps a lot to talk about how one feels. You have to let out a little now and then. I: Andrea, p. 6, line 4).

She further voiced: *'maar dit voel goed om 'n bietjie te huil, want ek voel 'n verligting'* (But it feels good to cry a little, because I feel relieved. I: Andrea, p. 9, line 1).

Wanda, the most introverted co-researcher on the team expressed her retrospective thoughts by saying, *'die heelyd was ek net nervous maar soos ons gepraat het, dit was nou vir my baie lekker. Ek het dit nou gewaardeer. Ek het nou eintlik geleer 'n mens moet nie skaam wees om te praat nie, want niemand gaat weet wat is jou probleem as jy nie gaat praat nie.'* (The whole time I was just nervous but as we talked, it was very nice for me. I appreciated it. I actually learned one should

not be afraid to talk, because no one will know what your problem is if you do not talk. I: Wanda, p. 7, line 42).

Another co-researcher reflected that the process reminded her to be grateful, by stating,

'taking me back just remind me that I have so much to be grateful for, because you know, I might - I could have just easily been locked down, you know. But I overcame and I actually have a story to tell, that someone needs to hear and know that it's not the end and they do not have to stay stuck there any longer, because for me it also took years.' (I: Kiah, p. 16, line 22).

From the excerpts, it is evident that the co-researchers expanded their self-understanding and gained retrospective insights into their lived realities. To end off, one of the co-researchers stated something profound and applicable to all of the women.

'I'm just in awe of this whole journey and, you know, sometimes we forget where we've been. As a person, you always learn. There's things to learn and you can always work on yourself and improve more. So I can now see I have a picture of where I was and where I am now. And what are some of the things that are still stuck with me and that I need to get rid of and let go.'

(I: Kiah, p. 16, line 29).



Figure 4.15: Extract from Shandre's collage
(Source: Author)

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter gave an overview of the research study, including a brief look at the theoretical framework, research design, research questions, data generation techniques, and data analysis. Also, mention was made about the women in the study and a brief history was given to create a context for further discussion. The categories, themes, and subthemes were presented as they emerged from the data analysis.

During data analysis, four categories emerged from the various data generated. The women in the study elaborated on their reactions to their pregnancy, both from themselves and from others. Being a new mother was quite a daunting new role and the co-researchers defined their relationships with their children and what it means to them to be a single parent. Furthermore, they reflected on their own lived experiences, and a responsibility emerged to educate others.

They further identified the various phases of identity and how these had changed throughout their lives. The co-researchers described their own conflicts and struggle with identity, especially the influence of

group identity and a need to belong in the community. From the data analysis, it was clear that each of the women were on a journey to create a redemptive identity despite the adversity and marginalisation with which they had dealt.

Furthermore, the co-researchers in this study disclosed the impact of the community on their lived realities and experiences. They elaborated on the negative factors plaguing Ukomelela, such as financial constraints, negative peer groups, community violence, and stigmatisation. Additionally, the women voiced the influence that early motherhood had on school attainment, the role of the father, the lack of parental involvement, and support. These led to feelings of isolation and despondent outcomes. Despite all the negative factors in Ukomelela, the women made me aware of the positive aspects that foster hope for a desired future.

The women also spoke of moments of resilience throughout the study. They indicated social support and religious awareness as resources for young women dealing with early motherhood. Personal growth was reflected in their lived experiences and the co-researchers often made mention of agency within the community and their responsibility to make a change.

The findings in this study were coherent with the relevant literature and other research regarding early motherhood, identity, community factors, and resilience. It is evident that for the co-researchers of the study, early motherhood is a sensitive and complex phenomenon. Furthermore, the findings clearly indicate the effects that early motherhood had on the women's identity formation and their capacity for resilience.

In the next and final chapter of this thesis, the findings of the study will be given in more detail. Chapter 5 will also serve as an overall conclusion for the research study, which will include the study's strengths, limitations, and further recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Interpretation of the Findings, Recommendations, and Suggestions for Further Research

'I'm just in awe of this whole journey and, you know, sometimes we forget where we've been.'

(Kiah, p. 16, line 29)

5.1. Introduction

In this study, I used a qualitative approach incorporating community-based participatory action research (CBPAR). The aim was to gain insight into the meaning-making processes of the co-researchers as they interacted with the relevant research questions pertaining to early motherhood, identity formation and resilience. Journeying towards the understanding that 'action research is about seeking a voice with which to speak one's experience and one's ability to learn from that experience.' (Winter, 1998, p. 53), several topics, as they pertained to the research questions, were examined:

- The views the women have of themselves with regard to being adolescent mothers
- The meaning-making experiences of early motherhood and how this influenced their identity formation
- Intrinsic and extrinsic variables that have assisted or hindered the women in navigating their lives and making sense of their lived experiences

In this chapter, I will contextualise the findings of the study and relate them to the literature, as described in Chapter 2. Additionally, I will make mention of my role as a qualitative researcher and my experience throughout the process. In conclusion, I will discuss the limitations and propose recommendations for future research.

5.2. The Research Findings

According to Palus and McGuire (2015), 'dialogue supports action research by revealing hidden data (both objective facts and subjective beliefs) and by creating, testing, and revising shared understandings about research findings and insights' (p. 692). A multi-theoretical lens, including aspects from Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model, and Positive Psychology's Resilience Theory was used to analyse and interpret the data generated in this study (see Chapter 2 and Chapter 3). Exploring the lived realities of the co-researchers by 'reimagining and reconstructing ways through which knowledge is constructed and shared' (Angu, 2018, p. 9), was done using a multitude of creative arts-based techniques. These techniques afforded us a creative space for 'transformative learning and change' (Palus & McGuire, 2015,

p. 691) to occur through dialogue. It further celebrated the women's agency and created a community of practice during the research process.

These techniques were used to address the research questions and to weave the co-researchers' meaning-making from the complexity of their responses. In the following sections, I seek to present a discussion, exploring and reflecting, in relation to the literature, the co-researchers' lived experiences of motherhood, identity formation, their community, and resilience by answering the posed research question (see section 5.1).

5.2.1. The views the women have of themselves with regard to being adolescent mothers

Our views of ourselves are greatly influenced by our own self-understanding and the reasons behind why we do certain things and make certain choices. Motherhood is one of the choices that play a role in how women view themselves.

As seen from the literature and the findings of the study, motherhood is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that embraces a range of features (Frenkel et al., 2011; Lundgren, et al., 2019; Shloim et al., 2020). This complexity is exacerbated when motherhood occurs at an earlier developmental phase, such as adolescence. As Kiah expressed,

'Ek het nie geweet wat dit is eerstens om 'n ouer te wees nie.' (I didn't know what it meant firstly to be a parent. FG: Kiah, p. 34, line 25), she further elaborated that *'kinders is sommer grootmense'* (Children are just adults, FG, p. 36, line 23).

During adolescence, we as humans are in a very volatile phase of development, characterised by a search for identity, often asking the question 'Who am I?' (Sokol, 2009; Orenstein & Lewis, 2020; Maree, 2021). For the young mothers in the study, it is even more difficult to ascertain an identity and to clarify the above question, as they are now also required to take care of a baby, who needs extensive love and support. Kiah's statement illustrated this when she said,

'En as jy so voel, dan kan jy nie vir jou kind liefde gee nie. Dis hoekom ek vir child abuse daar het. Want daai blessing is nou nie meer 'n blessing nie. Daai blessing is nou 'n curse. Daai kind het gekom en daai kind het jou lewe net omgedop en gekrap.' (And if you feel like that you can't give your child love. That is why I abused the child. Because that blessing is no longer a blessing. That blessing is now a curse. That child came and that child messed up your life. FG: Kiah, p. 35, line 12).

Motherhood and adolescence intertwined when the co-researchers became aware of their pregnancy. The women's responses suggested a fear of disclosing their pregnancy to their parents and immediate caregivers owing to fear of disappointment and abandonment. As Shandre mentioned,

'Ek het gevoel asof my lewe tot 'n einde gekom het' (I felt as if my life had ended, I: Shandre, p. 3, line 17)

when her mother abandoned her at her most vulnerable point in life. This often resulted in mixed emotions expressed by the co-researchers in navigating this complex situation and many of them expressed anxiety, depressive symptoms, and feelings of isolation. This can be seen when Kiah stated that for

'years I walk with that depression, that rejection, that isolation.' (FG: Kiah, p. 2, line 14).

More extreme measures, such as contemplating abortion as a permanent solution to their current predicament, were also considered, although none of the women in the study went through with it. According to literature, an estimated 2,5 million adolescent girls have unsafe abortions each year. Of these, about 68 000 girls die as a result of abortion as a solution to early motherhood (UNICEF, 2008; WHO, 2011). One of the co-researchers disclosed her numerous attempts when she stated,

'Ek het al klomp dinge probeer doen om ontslae te raak van die kind' (I tried a lot of things to get rid of the child. I: Shandre, p. 3, line: 17).

Hiding their unplanned pregnancy was a very common experience shared by the women in the study. They voiced that this was mostly owing to fear of straining relationships with their families (Mashala et al., 2012; Ntinda et al., 2016; Govender et al., 2020). Once they had shared the news of their pregnancy with their parents or caregivers, they were confronted with a range of responses. According to most of the women, they were often left to their own devices; were met with indifference or abandonment. This emotional rejection is, according to Chiazor (2017), and Vincent and Alemu (2016), a common manifestation when parents do not know how to express their emotions to the news of an early pregnancy. Unfortunately, the parents' or families' reactions often exacerbated the women's feelings of rejection by the ones they thought cared the most for them. Shandre's feelings of rejection were quite prominent when she mentioned,

'My ma-hulle verstoot my. Hulle verwyf my.' (My parents reject me. They resent me. I: Shandre, p. 4, line 10).

These feelings of confusion, vulnerability, and rejection were further worsened by little psycho-social support. They do, however, mention that despite their parents' expression of disappointment in their daughters, they continued to, on occasion, support them financially. The co-researchers also shared that becoming pregnant during their teenage years often meant that they remained dependent on their parents or family for socio-economic support and could not be financially independent while having to raise a child. This limited their autonomy and agency within their own lives.

Furthermore, the women shared an increased perception that they not only had to cope with the reality of being a new mother but that they also had to navigate the physical and emotional rollercoaster that accompanied their pregnancies. In a study conducted by Masuku et al. (2021), it was found that navigating the physical changes during adolescence were particularly challenging. According to the authors, additional contributing factors to possible suicide ideation and suicidal thoughts were 'the family rejection and the rejection by their babies' fathers, loneliness and not receiving support from their loved ones' (p. 273) Mental health issues and suicide ideation was experienced by the co-researchers during their pregnancies, and after birth, as Shandre mentioned:

'Ek het gevoel ek kan myself doodmaak' (I felt like I could kill myself, I: Shandre, p. 3 line 19).

The women in the study expressed mixed emotions about the arrival of their child and how the initial feelings of excitement made way for awareness of their realities of being a single parent and sole caregiver. The views and experiences shared by the women in this study are in line with research, as Xavier et al. (2018) found that teenage mothers are at a higher risk of long-term mental health difficulties, but the phenomenon is still poorly understood and under-researched. In contrast, Chan et al. (2016) found that the risk of suicide is three times higher in pregnant adolescent girls than in adult women who are pregnant.

The findings in this study suggest that the complexity of motherhood during adolescence influenced the co-researchers' self-understanding and their answers to the question of 'Who am I?' (Laney et al., 2015). It was expressed that many young girls do not realise the permanency of their early choices for the rest of their lives and the influence it has. Initially, the reality of motherhood was a difficult one to face and it was met with unexpected opinions and views by their families and peers. Yet, the women expressed that becoming mothers facilitated them in gaining maturity and a feeling of wanting to be better humans for their own children, as Jeslyn voiced,

'Die pad is lank en die klippe is hard maar ek het meer volwasse geraak' (The road is long and the rocks are hard, but I became more mature, I: Jeslyn, p. 8, line 38).

Upon reflection throughout this journey, the women voiced that motherhood gave them purpose and a reason to wake up in the mornings (Ahorlu et al., 2015; Pfeiffer et al., 2017).

They believed reflection was a powerful tool to make sense of their past and to create hope for their future (Bell, 1998; Feldman, 1999; Lew & Schmidt, 2011; Mertens, 2017; Pham, 2018; Bastalich, 2020). Through talking, listening, questioning, and reflecting, the conversation process allowed 'the co-researchers the opportunities to develop understanding' that can then be used to support decisions about the choice of goals or actions (Feldman, 1999, p. 136). This further relates to the research methodology in that it afforded a space for the co-researchers to express agency and give voice to their lived

experiences. Personal reflection and projecting their thoughts onto the artefacts created during their research journeys proved to be an influential tool in how they viewed participating in this CBPAR study (Franz, 2010; Kara, 2015; Palus & McGuire, 2015; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Cohen-Miller, 2017; Dunn & Mellor, 2017; Gameiro et al., 2018). According to them, it created an opportunity to explore their voice in creative ways and it also helped them, often for the first time, to feel comfortable and confident in expressing what they had been 'holding inside for many years' as Andrea voiced:

'maar dit voel goed om 'n bietjie te huil, want ek voel 'n verligting' (But it feels good to cry a little, because I feel relieved. I: Andrea, p. 9, line 1).

5.2.2. The meaning-making experiences of early motherhood and how this influenced their identity formation

Throughout life, we encounter many difficulties that have the potential to derail our desired trajectories. The co-researchers mentioned numerous events that influenced their identity formation, and oftentimes even their self-worth. According to a study by Masuku et al. (2021, p. 271), women 'lost their identity' through difficulties in life, including early motherhood.

Their journeys as young girls in Ukomelela started at home, as part of a family system. This family mostly consisted of a single parent, or even grandparent. Unfortunately, the women were of the opinion that a lack of love within the familial system often led them to seek external affection and attention within the community, often from other young men. Shandre's words echo this sentiment when she states that

'Jy vind iets wat jy nie in die huis kry nie' (You find something you do not find in the house. I: Shandre, p. 8, line 2).

A sense of loneliness and the need to have a person to love was positively correlated with early motherhood (Wahn et al., 2005).

Ukomelela is a small community, and the co-researchers were in agreement that the majority of the adults in Ukomelela were often not the best of role models for the young people. Exposure to drugs, alcohol, violence, sexual abuse and early motherhood was prevalent from a young age (Ludidi, 2019; Siketsha, 2019; Siketsha, 2020; Ukomelela Community Empowerment Project, 2020). Jeslyn confirmed this by stating,

'[...] meeste van die tyd het ek grootgeraak met geweld' ([...] most of the time, I grew up with violence, I: Jeslyn, p. 1, line 13).

According to the co-researchers, as adolescence set in, it was easier to follow in these adults' footsteps as they were the only role models the youths were exposed to. For the co-researchers, and many of the youths in the community, childhood intertwined with adulthood at an incredibly young age and there was

no subtle transition into their new role as a mother. The women expressed their lack of knowledge about what it meant to be a mother and even how to be one. Consequently, the co-researchers questioned their worth, which led to decision-making that would inevitably influence their identities. Literature on the subject found that negative feelings of self-worth were highly correlated to teenage pregnancy and risky sexual behaviours (Fedorowicz et al., 2014; Masuku et al., 2021). Subsequently, the co-researchers related how their unwise decision-making was influenced by a lack of self-worth, and they mentioned how empowering it would be to the youth if they are taught their worth:

'If we can teach the girls their worth and once they know their worth, they will know exactly what they deserve and they won't compromise or settle for anything other than that which they believe they deserve.' (I: Kiah, p. 6, line 49).

Initially, motherhood was seen by the women as a burden which infringed on their freedom to go places and do activities they used to enjoy with their friends. These activities were part of who they were before they became mothers and thus motherhood seemed to intrude on their sense of identity. The women did not consolidate their new role as mothers easily and expressed a need to be part of a group, which often led to identity struggles and mental health issues during this time (Edhborg et al., 2005; Laney et al., 2015; Gaete & Araya, 2017). These struggles formed part of the women's journeys in discovering their own identities. For them, it was a necessary evil in making meaning, forming their current identity and realising their resilience (Gyan et al., 2017; Harms et al., 2018), as Wanda stated,

'Dit was baie moeilik, maar ek het daar deurgekom.' (It was very difficult, but I got through it. I: Wanda, p. 3, line 34).

As the women started making peace with their new identities and roles as mothers, they saw their instinctive motherly love and sense of responsibility as a source of agency in their journeys (Ahorlu et al., 2015; Pfeiffer et al., 2017). Stemming from this pursuit of increased responsibility to care for their children, the co-researchers experienced motherhood as a positive influence on their lives as many of the women mentioned that in their younger years they participated in questionable activities, but that motherhood led to a change in identity and increased self-understanding, as Andrea expressed,

'So ek is nou baie mature. En ek hou daarvan.' (So, I'm very mature now. And I like it. I: Andrea, p. 4, line 26).

The findings suggest that the women's lived realities, however dark and miserable they might have been, created meaning for them in their lives thus far. They expressed that now they see themselves as women, mothers, and active members of a community filled with hope for a brighter future. All these various aspects played into the notion of self-understanding and helped to develop and refine their identities. The adversity and pain they experienced created strength for the women in the study as they shared that

having gone through challenging times often made them realise their intrinsic strength and resilience. The co-researchers expressed that motherhood, amongst other things, was a major life change for them. Reflecting on their journeys, the co-researchers found meaning in their choices, decisions and experiences that positively influenced their identity. This formed an integral part of the CBPAR outcomes for the study.

5.2.3. Intrinsic and extrinsic variables that have assisted or hindered the women in navigating their lives and making sense of their lived experiences

The findings illustrate several key points related to the women's experiences of both intrinsic and extrinsic variables in their lives and how these have either assisted or hindered their meaning-making experiences and resilience.

The dominant view held by the co-researchers was that various extrinsic events within their community had influenced their internal worlds. Many of the women disclosed traumatic childhood events such as neglect and verbal, physical, and sexual abuse within their immediate family systems. Violence was not limited to the home environment and is prevalent in the community, especially when drugs and alcohol are present, as Wanda explained:

'Hulle gaan na smokkelhuise en drink en dan het hulle 'n squarrel. Daar is baie geweld.' (They go to Shebeens and drink and then they get into a fight. There is a lot of violence, I: Wanda, p. 2, line 9).

The findings suggest that the youth predominantly get involved in these activities owing to a lack of positive role models, the need to belong to a group and to fit in with peers as well as a lack of constructive activities that can occupy and give the youth purpose.

As presented in the literature and findings of the study, unemployment, financial constraints and a reliance on the SASSA Government grant as well as a lack of adequate housing contributed to feelings of despondency that hindered the women's lived experiences and positive decision-making (Kanku & Mash, 2010; Jonas et al., 2016; Masuku et al., 2021). One of the co-researchers admitted that becoming pregnant at a young age was a way of seeking a better life filled with financial stability and love. Oftentimes, the women were of the view that a lack of parental love, support and care pushed them to seek these in the arms of young men, inevitably leading to pregnancy. As outlined in Chapter 2, early motherhood had negative implications for school and job attainment, which kept the cycle of poverty going.

The women in the study further alluded to numerous variables that contribute to early motherhood, including stigmatisation around clinic and contraceptive use, as Andrea mentioned,

'Hulle is bang om kliniek toe te gaan oor die stigma.' (They are afraid of going to the clinic due to stigma, I: Andrea, p. 3, line 15).

The co-researchers mentioned that at Ukomelela's clinic the staff frequently gossiped and made them feel unworthy. The findings indicate that the community members themselves played a major role in the lack of contraceptive use amongst the youth. Furthermore, men intimidate women not to use condoms as they preferred the *'skin to skin'* feeling (I: Shandre, p. 10, line 12) of having sex without a condom.

The findings further illustrated there is a lack of open communication between parents, teachers and adolescents around sex, as Jeslyn mentioned that when trying to talk to her mother about sex, she got

'moenie jou bene oopmaak vir enige jong nie en gebruik 'n kondoom' (Don't open your legs for any boy and use a condom, I: Jeslyn, p. 2, line 37).

There was consensus among the co-researchers that sexual education at school solely centred on the biological aspects of reproduction and did not include finer details pertaining to the reality of having sex and becoming pregnant. It was further indicated by the findings that parents were often not comfortable speaking about sex to their children and avoided the topic. The co-researchers indicated that there needs to be a collaborative effort between schools and the community to strengthen education around sex and to guide adolescents towards more effective decision-making. This was echoed in the literature when Allen (as quoted in Kangaude et al., 2020, p. 704) stated that '[s]exuality education is often focused on adults' perception of sex as-risk rather than an investment in children's own voices about sexuality in ways that matter to them'. The women in the study believed open communication was needed in ensuring effective sexual education.

The research findings suggested that support plays an important role in early motherhood and was confirmed by literature (Kirchengast, 2016; Chung & Lee, 2018). In concurrence with this, many of the co-researchers voiced that their life trajectories might have been dramatically different had they felt supported by their child's father and by other family members. With this in mind, Andrea mentioned that

'As my ma meer betrokke gewees het in my lewe, dan sou, ek glo dan sou dinge anders gewees het vandag.' (If my mother had been more involved in my life, then, I believe, things would have been different today. I: Andrea, p. 3, line 9).

The women further mentioned that the support they received was invaluable and guided their journeys to have meaning.

In this study, the findings further suggested that religious awareness and the ability to believe in a higher power gave them the intrinsic strength to continue their daily journeys of motherhood (Martins & Gall, 2021). Shandre voiced this sentiment by saying,

'Ek bid vir die Here, om te sê, hou vir my, vir my kind se onthalwe' (I pray to the Lord, to say, keep me, for my child's sake, I: Shandre, p. 4, line 34).

This adds credence to the view that the women navigated their lived experience of adversity and marginalisation to culminate in resilience, meaning-making, and a way of learning and growing to become the people they feel they were meant to be. This growth was expressed by Wanda when she reflected on her lived experience by saying,

'Ek het groot veranderinge in my lewe gemaak' (I made big changes in my life, I: Wanda, p. 6, line 19).

In conclusion, the findings advocated for change in Ukomelela. The women expressed that for things to change in the greater community, change needed to be initiated from within. Part of the goals of using a CBPAR method was to activate change by using the co-researchers' agency.

5.3 Limitations of the Research

As with all research, especially from a qualitative perspective, degrees of limitation exist. Since this study involved writing a mini-dissertation as part of fulfilling the requirements to obtain a Master's degree in Educational Psychology, the study was limited in its scope.

It is important to note that this study delimited itself to the experiences of a small number of marginalised women within the specific research context and therefore, does not presume to speak for all women who have become mothers during adolescence in the community or in the broader South African context.

Despite the small sample size and the fact that the findings could not be viewed as generalisable, the quality of the data produced offered valuable insights into the co-researchers' lived realities and meaning-making experiences of early motherhood and how this affected their identity formation and resilience.

Another limitation of the research study presented itself in relation to the chronosystem. The Covid-19 pandemic changed the face of research, and this affected data generation and ordinary face-to-face practices typically taken for granted during research processes. Within the boundaries of this study, the complexities related to the research topic and action research data generation practices shifted to an online platform. The technology and research process were new to both the researcher and co-researchers. Only six co-researchers were included in the study. The small sample may be due to various contributing factors. Considering that the study took place amid the Covid-19 pandemic, many community

members might not have felt safe to be part of a research study at that time or they might have mistrusted the use of online data collection. Furthermore, community members might have avoided joining owing to the fear of stigma, or to anxiety related to gossip because of the sensitive nature of the study. It is therefore vital that the findings and opinions be understood from an individual perspective rather than a collective association. It is important to take into consideration the context within which the study took place and the novelty of online data generation for a marginalised community.

Even though much effort was expended to include women from various ethnicities within the community, the sample did not include a great deal of diversity. Prospective researchers may wish to increase racial and cultural diversity in a sample related to the phenomenon of interest as this will contribute valuable insights.

Finally, my role as researcher cannot be ignored within a CBPAR model. Although my role as researcher has had an influence on the research process and cannot be eliminated completely, I have tried my utmost to put measures in place to minimise it as much as possible. To mitigate any influence I might have had, I held regular consultations with my supervisor and critical friends, regularly reviewed the verbatim transcriptions, and made every effort to ensure that the co-researchers' words, often in Afrikaans, were used in the correct context and for the correct purpose. Furthermore, constant reflection and critical evaluation of my influence with the use of my reflective journal was vital. In addition, it was of vital importance to submerge myself in relevant literature about the phenomenon under study. This was all done as an attempt to limit my influence on the research process.

5.4. Strengths of the Study

This study set out to explore an issue that has been plaguing communities in South Africa for many decades. Although early motherhood is a well-researched area of study, few studies explored the women's retrospective lived realities to gain a greater repertoire of new knowledge. Within qualitative research and specifically, community-based participatory action research, a central part of the study was valuing the voices of the co-researchers using dialogue. According to Palus and McGuire (2015) dialogue, especially when using visual stimuli, affords the co-researchers 'deeper levels of meaning and shared understanding' (p. 691). The collaborative nature of the conversations in the study further sought, through 'talking, listening, questioning, and reflecting ... [to enable] in an exploration of shared intentionality [to create] opportunities to develop understanding [...] and relational knowledge' about the phenomenon under study (Feldman, 2006, p. 129–131).

Several of the women shared that participating in the 'collaborative nature of [these] conversations' (Feldman, 2006, p. 129), allowed them to explore their meaning-making in relation to others and that

exploring this element of having their lived realities being witnessed by others, had been a powerfully freeing experience. Critical analysis is mindful of the research focus and the specific context in which this study was positioned. A significant gap in the literature, as it pertained to the voice of the often marginalised women, in a retro-reflection of their lived realities, provided an opportunity for the co-researchers to contribute to academic and psycho-social knowledge around the topic. In addition, considering how we could open spaces for verbal and non-verbal communication amid the Covid-19 pandemic, meant that we had to be creative, responsive and willing to be guided by each other's ways of knowing and being.

In addition, owing to the sensitive nature of the topic, and the vulnerable population with whom I engaged, ethical practices and safe engagements with the co-researchers were of the utmost importance. Constant reflection on my part as a trainee educational psychologist and a novice researcher afforded me opportunities to stay true to the research process, as the literature reminds us that action learning can happen 'when people learn from each other, create their own resources, identify their own problems and form their own solutions' (Zuber-Skerritt, 2009, p. 181, in Petersen, 2020, p. 12). Furthermore, the utmost effort was made to respect the values and interests of the community and co-researchers involved in the study, by safeguarding quality communication and reflective understanding. In seeking to ensure that every effort was made to acknowledge each of the co-researchers, their nuanced meaning-making related to their knowledge and lived realities, regular member checks were done to encourage critical reflection of the phenomenon of interest, their interactions, and the research context (Zuber-Skerritt et al., 2020).

In seeking to ensure trustworthiness and triangulation of the data, I aimed to remain transparent throughout the process. From a social constructivist worldview, I acknowledged that there is no objective truth and that knowledge, reason, and emotion occur amid relationships (Gergen & Gergen, 2012; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). By recognising the co-researchers as the experts in their own lives, this study considered how we illustrated how the women navigated through their lives and created meaning. I chose to combine the social constructivist, interpretive, and transformative paradigms to ensure rich descriptions and in-depth insights into early motherhood. Thus, triangulation of theories created the opportunity to explore the data from various vantage points to produce new perspectives surrounding the phenomenon under study. The inclusion of various paradigms allowed me to gain deeper insight into the lived realities and meaning-making processes of the women concerning the research topic using creative arts-based techniques (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Silverman, 2017).

Furthermore, the Covid-19 pandemic rapidly transformed the original data generation process since everything was done in the virtual space. The reconsideration of data generation techniques required me

to be reflective and to do additional research about how one would be able to navigate communication as the research process unfolded. For this reason, we utilised WhatsApp as the main platform for dialogue to occur, which proved an innovative method of data generation during this time and space.

Multiple data sources were used and all online individual interviews and focus group discussions were recorded and transcribed verbatim. This was done to minimise any bias in the data and research process. Member-checking with co-researchers further ensured the accuracy of interpretations during data collection and analysis. Thus, a shared experience was created by allowing for transparency and ownership by the co-researchers. Additionally, I kept a reflective journal where I noted the interactions, opinions, and nuances during the research process. It allowed me to reflect honestly on the journey as well as on my own behaviours and learning patterns. Extracts were included in the thesis to enhance the trustworthiness of the study. I regularly consulted with my supervisor and critical friends to ensure that the co-researchers' voices and lived realities were highlighted as part of a community of practice. All of the above was done to contribute to the rigour of the study conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic.

It is the hope of this study that these shared experiences and ways of knowing may inspire other young mothers to explore their own lived realities and to enhance their self-awareness and acknowledgement of their resilience. Although the findings cannot be generalised, the insights and knowledge gained by using an open and collaborative approach, can be useful to others in similar situations and may add to the limited literature studies currently available.

5.5 Recommendations

The findings of this qualitative, community-based participatory action research study revealed insights into the lived realities of women in a marginalised community who have experienced early motherhood. Although these insights may add to the body of knowledge pertaining to adolescent pregnancy and the contributing factors, there are multiple avenues for future research in this area of study. Owing to the small sample size and limited current research on lived realities of women who become mothers during their teenage years within the South African context, further research into the phenomenon is recommended.

This research study specifically focused on a group of women within a marginalised community in the Western Cape. It would be valuable to extend the current research study to other communities throughout South Africa, including more diverse populations. During the Covid-19 pandemic, technology played a vital role in accessing community members. Therefore, I believe that online interviews can be used to extend the study to more diverse and hard-to-reach populations across the country.

It is important to conduct further research that seeks to explore the meaning-making processes of young women and to what extent their self-belief impacts their vulnerability to engage in sexual activities. The use of creative arts-based methodologies can be incorporated to facilitate such discussions to gain rich descriptions.

One of the many avenues to consider in this regard includes evaluating the role the community plays in supporting adolescent parents and what opportunities are created by parents, teachers, and the greater community for education around sex. Furthermore, investigation is recommended into the role parents play in educating the youth about pregnancy and to what extent they are comfortable having these discussions with their children.

5.6 Conclusion

Early motherhood is unfortunately not a new phenomenon, or one that will disappear soon. It is therefore imperative that ongoing research be done around this topic to give women a voice to relay their experiences as a means of adding to the literature. It is hoped that this study will be used for further research to make adolescent girls more aware of their own intrinsic resilience and of the support structures available. I, therefore, concur with Mungwini (2018) that it is important that women, especially in Africa, 'should strive to fashion [their] own vision of the future informed by [their] own historical experiences' (p. 2). Thus, the current community-based participatory action research study aimed to give a voice to women whose lived experiences are often overlooked and undervalued. I intended to capture and showcase the co-researchers' experiences and voices authentically to strengthen the trustworthiness of the study and to reduce any potential harm. Thus, the following conceptual conclusions were drawn in response to the research question:

- The views the women formed about themselves as adolescent mothers were influenced by their own self-understanding of, and reflection on, their choices and lived experiences. The women voiced that with the awareness of their pregnancy came a fear of disclosure owing to fear of abandonment and disappointment. Mixed emotions accompanied the disclosure and many of the women reported feelings of depression, isolation, and anxiety. This led to the contemplation of abortion as an option out of their predicament. The women in the study further disclosed how they were often left to their own devices after confiding in their loved ones. Some of the women were, however, met with indifference as parents often did not know how to respond to the news. The lack of support exacerbated feelings of rejection. Support was often a luxury not afforded to many of the women. Their families, however, helped them financially in some instances but this left them without independence or autonomy of choice. Another factor that influenced the

women's views of themselves was that they often had to navigate the physical and emotional rollercoaster of pregnancy by themselves. They further expressed initial excitement at the birth of their child, but the realities of being a mother were overwhelming. Furthermore, the co-researchers voiced that, in their opinion, adolescent girls do not realise the permanency of their choices. Having said this, they further stated that becoming a mother at such a young age gave them purpose and that reflection on their journeys created hope for the future.

- The women in the study explored the difficulties they encountered on their journeys and how these influenced their identity formation and self-worth. A lack of love and support within the familial system led the women to seek affection elsewhere. Furthermore, as a small community rife with violence and alcoholism and drug abuse, the women's peer group were often a negative influence on their behaviour as there was a lack of positive role models. For many of the women in the study, childhood and adulthood intertwined at a young age as they were victims of violence and sexual abuse. This led them to question their own worth and influenced the way they saw themselves. In addition, motherhood was often seen as a burden for the women as it culminated in a loss of freedom which intruded on their own sense of self. The women mentioned how motherhood influenced their mental health and how they contemplated suicide on multiple occasions. Upon reflection, the co-researchers realised that their often difficult experiences led to a sense of resilience, which positively influenced their current identity. As the women started accepting motherhood as part of who they had become, their outlook on life and caring nature started emerging. The women experienced motherhood as a positive influence as it aided in their maturity and sense of responsibility.
- Various intrinsic and extrinsic variables were found to influence the women's meaning-making journeys. The dominant view held by the co-researchers was that various extrinsic events within their community had influenced their internal worlds. Apart from drug and alcohol abuse, sexual abuse, community violence, and negative peer pressure, the women felt that there was a lack of constructive activities to occupy the youth of Ukomelela. The women voiced that pregnancy is oftentimes seen as a way to break the poverty cycle within their home environments although, in fact, this exacerbated their lack of means and negatively influenced school and job attainment. Furthermore, the women stated how stigmatisation, lack of education, and a failure by schools and parents to have open and honest conversations regarding sexual exploration hindered their ability to make appropriate decisions. Thus, a collaborative effort between clinics, schools and parents was suggested. Support and religious awareness were factors that proved invaluable on

the women's journeys of meaning-making. Upon reflection, the women advocated for change **within** the community, **by** the community.

Reflection proved to be a powerful tool in this study as it aimed to activate change by utilising the co-researcher's agency within their own community. It is hoped that through this discussion the study has contributed to the limited body of knowledge pertaining to the meaning-making processes of adolescent mothers through the use of reflection, and how this has informed their identity and resilience practises. I am thus reminded of Sy and Cruz (2019), who mentions that reflection can be a powerful learning tool that guides people in developing and growing constructively from their experiences, especially if it is followed by 'intentional and thoughtful actions' (p. 1204). During our interactions and discussions around the topic of early motherhood, the women of Ukomelela served as zones of proximal development to me as a novice researcher. Their voices and lived experiences expanded my own learning on early motherhood and the realities women in marginalised communities face throughout South Africa. I provide an excerpt from my reflective journal regarding my own learning as I engaged with the women from Ukomelela below:

Reflective Journal, 3 December 2020

Reflecting on this journey brings about so many emotions. How privileged I am to have been a part of these women's stories; how they let me into their lives; how they opened up their hearts and blurted out their darkest secrets. I am in awe of the strength and resilience of the women in my study. The radical thing about resilience is that you cannot experience it without adversity. And the women from Ukomelela have had more than their fair share, yet they speak with confidence and added knowledge. They speak with agency and a sense of 'wake up and listen to me, I also have a voice'. I admire these women. I admire their fearlessness. Most of them proclaimed that by sharing their lived experience there has been a sense of relief, a freedom of the past, so to say. The women all thanked me for the opportunity to be part of this study, but it is I who should thank them. For without their courage and strength, none of this would have been possible. May God bless and keep them going from strength to strength.

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Appendix A: Short Contact Form

INTEREST IN PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH STUDY BELANGSTELLING IN DEELNAME AAN NAVORSINGSTUDIE

Navorsers: Cerise Rabie

U voldoen aan die volgende kriteria:

- U is 'n vrou wat gedurende u tienerjare swanger geraak het.
- U is ouer as 21 jaar.
- U gaan nie meer skool nie.

U stel daarin belang om deel te neem aan die volgende studie:

- Verkenning van identiteitsvorming van 'n groep vroue wat tydens adolessensie swanger geraak het

U sal versoek word om aan die volgende deel te neem:

- 'n Aanlyn individuele onderhoud. Dit sal ongeveer 45 tot 60 minute duur.
- Twee aanlyn fokusgroepbesprekings. Dit sal ongeveer 60 tot 90 minute elk duur.

Researcher: Cerise Rabie

You meet the following criteria:

- *You are a woman who became pregnant during your teenage years.*
- *You are currently older than 21 years.*
- *You no longer attend school.*

You are interested in participating in the following study:

- *Exploring the identity formation experiences of a group of women who became mothers during adolescence*

You will be asked to participate in the following:

- *An online individual interview. This will take approximately 45 to 60 minutes.*
- *Two online focus group discussions. This will take approximately 60 to 90 minutes each.*

Naam / Name:	
Van / Surname:	
Huidige ouderdom / Current age:	
Ouderdom tydens eerste swangerskap / Age during first pregnancy:	
Selfoonnommer / Cell phone number:	

** Deur die vorm in te vul, gee ek aan die navorsers toestemming om my te kontak.*

** **By filling out this form I give permission to the researcher to contact me.***

Appendix B: Afrikaans and English Consent Forms



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UNIVERSITEIT STELLENBOSCH VRYWARINGSVORM OM AAN NAVORSING DEEL TE NEEM

Titel van die navorsingstudie: Exploring the identity formation experiences of a group of women who became mothers during adolescence (Verkenning van identiteitsvorming van 'n groep vroue wat tydens adolessensie swanger geraak het)

Navorsers: Cerise Rabie

U word hiermee versoek om deel te neem aan 'n navorsingstudie wat deur Cerise Rabie (MEdPsych) van die Departement Opvoedkundige Sielkunde aan die Universiteit Stellenbosch gedoen word as deel van die vereistes vir die voltooiing van 'n magistertesis in Opvoedkundige Sielkunde.

U is gekies as 'n moontlike deelnemer aan die studie aangesien u die profiel pas van die tipe deelnemer wat vir die navorsingstudie benodig word. Met ander woorde, u is 'n vrou wat swanger geraak het in u tienerjare, is tans ouer as 21 jaar en gaan nie meer skool nie.

1. DOEL VAN DIE STUDIE

Die doel van hierdie studie is om te ondersoek hoe vroeë moederskap moontlik die identiteitsvorming van 'n groep jong vroue beïnvloed het.

Dit word gerig deur die volgende navorsingsvraag: **Watter invloed het adolessente moederskap op die identiteitsvorming van 'n groep vroue in 'n lae sosio-ekonomiese gemeenskap gehad?**

Om die navorsingsvraag volledig te ondersoek, sal die volgende aanvullende navorsingsvrae ondersoek word:

- Hoe beskou die vrou hulself?
- Hoe het vroeë moederskap die vrou se identiteitsvorming beïnvloed?
- Watter intrinsieke en ekstrasieke veranderlikes het hulle gehelp of verhinder om hul lewens te navigeer?

2. WAT SAL VAN MY VERWAG WORD?

As u instem om aan hierdie studie deel te neem, sal u gevra word om:

- hierdie vrywaringsvorm in te vul en te onderteken; en
- deel te neem aan 'n aanlyn individuele onderhoud en projeksietegnieke oor bogenoemde tema. Dit sal ongeveer 45 tot 60 minute neem.

Hierna sal u die geleentheid kry om te besluit of u aan twee aanlyn fokusgroepbesprekings in groepe van ses tot agt deelnemers wil deelneem oor verskillende temas rakende vroeë moederskap, identiteit en veerkragtigheid. Projeksietegnieke (soos collage, kleiwerk en Photovoice) sal tydens die aanlyn

fokusgroepbesprekings gebruik word. Elke aanlyn fokusgroepbespreking sal ongeveer 60 tot 90 minute duur.

Die aanlyn onderhoude en fokusgroepbesprekings sal in Oktober - November 2020 plaasvind gedurende tye wat geskik sal wees vir u.

U sal ook versoek word om u beskikbaarheid aan te dui om inligting wat tydens die aanlyn individuele onderhoud en/of fokusgroepbesprekings gedeel is via elektroniese korrespondensie of telefonies te verduidelik of te bevestig, indien nodig.

3. MOONTLIKE RISIKO'S EN ONGEMAK

As u ongemak ervaar as gevolg van u deelname aan hierdie studie, het ek gereël dat [REDACTED] 'n kliniese sielkundige in Somerset-Wes, beskikbaar is om met u te konsulteer. Me [REDACTED] kan gekontak word by [REDACTED]. Die dienste wat deur Me [REDACTED] voorsien word, word gratis aangebied. Die navorser sal die vervoerkostes / data kostes, as die sessies aanlyn gaan plaasvind, dek.

4. MOONTLIKE VOORDELE VIR DEELNEMERS EN/OF DIE SAMELEWING

Die deel van ervarings met ander kan 'n suiweringsproses wees. Die navorser hoop om 'n veilige ruimte vir vroue te skep om hul ervarings van vroeë moederskap en hoe dit hul identiteitsvorming beïnvloed het, te deel. Hierdie gedeelde ervarings en maniere van weet kan ander inspireer om hul eie geleefde ervarings te ondersoek en hul selfbewustheid en erkenning van hul veerkrag te verhoog. Alhoewel dit nie moontlik is om die insigte wat opgedoen word te veralgemeen nie, hoop ek dat, deur 'n oop en samewerkende benadering te gebruik, die kennis nuttig kan wees vir ander in soortgelyke situasies.

5. BETALING VIR DEELNAME

Geen vergoeding sal vir deelname aan die studie gegee word nie. Die navorser sal egter die kostes verbonde aan deelname aan die studie dek. Dit sluit data kostes, vervoerkoste en die koste van die materiaal wat in die data-insameling gebruik sal word, in.

6. BESKERMING VAN U INLIGTING, VERTROULIKHEID EN IDENTITEIT

Enige inligting wat u tydens hierdie studie met die navorser deel wat u moontlik as deelnemer kan identifiseer, sal beskerm word, vertroulik bly en slegs met u toestemming of soos deur die wet vereis openbaar gemaak word.

Vertroulikheid sal verseker word deur die gebruik van skuilname en die verwydering van enige identifiserende inligting. Aanlyn onderhoude en fokusgroepbesprekings sal met klank en/of video opgeneem word (met u toestemming) en u het die reg om die transkripsies en opnames wat betrekking het op u deelname aan die studie te hersien. Die klank- en/of videobande sal op 'n wagwoordkodeerde USB-aandrywer bewaar word, asook op Microsoft OneDrive, en slegs die navorser en studieleier sal toegang daartoe hê. Alle papierdata, insluitende die River of Life- en Photovoice-aktiwiteit, sal in 'n geslote kabinet bewaar word waartoe slegs die navorser en studieleier toegang sal hê. Die inligting wat in hierdie navorsing gegenereer word, kan gebruik word vir publikasie in akademiese eweknie-beoordeelde vaktydskrifte en kan by 'n akademiese konferensie aangebied word.

7. DEELNAME EN ONTTREKKING

U kan kies of u aan hierdie studie wil deelneem of nie. U is ook geregtig om te eniger tyd te onttrek.

8. NAVORSER SE KONTAKBESONDERHEDE

As u enige vrae of kommer oor hierdie studie het, kontak gerus me Cerise Rabie, die hoof navorser, by [REDACTED] of e-pos [REDACTED] en/of die studieleier, Dr. Lynne Damons, by [REDACTED] of [REDACTED]

9. REGTE VAN DEELNEMERS

U mag u toestemming te eniger tyd terugtrek en die deelname stop. U doen nie afstand van enige regseise, regte of regsinnemiddele as gevolg van u deelname aan hierdie navorsingstudie nie. As u vrae het oor u regte as deelnemer aan navorsing, kontak [REDACTED] (808 462) by die Afdeling Navorsingsontwikkeling.

VERKLARING VAN TOESTEMMING DEUR DIE DEELNEMER

As **deelnemer** bevestig ek as volg:

- Bostaande inligting is geskryf en aan my verduidelik in 'n taal wat ek verstaan.
- Ek het die geleentheid gehad om deur die inligting te lees en vrae te vra oor enige onduidelike konsepte. Onduidelike konsepte is aan my verduidelik.
- Alle kwessies rakende privaatheid en die vertroulikheid en gebruik van inligting wat ek verskaf, is uiteengesit.
- Ek verstaan dat ek persoonlike besonderhede, gedagtes, ervarings, gevoelens en herinneringe sal moet verskaf.

Ek weet dat die navorser 'n stem-/video-opname sal maak en aantekeninge sal neem van die onderhoud en fokusgroepsessies. Ek het ook toestemming gegee dat die aantekeninge en stem- / video-opnames met die studieleier bespreek mag word. Ek verstaan ook dat my bydraes deur die navorser en die studieleier gerespekteer sal word.

Ek het my naam op hierdie papier geplaas om aan te toon dat ek instem om aan die aanlyn individuele onderhoude en aanlyn fokusgroepsessies deel sal neem.

Deur hier te onderteken, stem ek _____ (*naam van die deelnemer*) in om aan hierdie navorsingstudie deel te neem, soos uitgevoer deur Cerise Rabie (*naam van die hoofondersoeker*).

Handtekening van deelnemer

Datum

VERKLARING VAN TOESTEMMING DEUR DIE HOOFONDERSOEKER

As **hoofondersoeker** verklaar ek, Cerise Rabie, hiermee dat die inligting in hierdie dokument deeglik aan die deelnemer verduidelik is. Ek verklaar ook dat die deelnemer aangemoedig is (en genoeg tyd gegee is) om vrae te stel. Voorts kies ek die volgende opsie:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Die gesprek met die deelnemer is gevoer in 'n taal waarin die deelnemer vlot is.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Die gesprek met die deelnemer is gevoer met die hulp van 'n tolk (wat 'n nieopenbaarmakings-ooreenkoms onderteken het) en hierdie toestemmingsvorm is beskikbaar aan die deelnemer in 'n taal waarin die deelnemer vlot is.

Handtekening van die hoofondersoeker

Datum



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STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title of the research project: Exploring the identity formation experiences of a group of women who became mothers during adolescence.

Researcher: Cerise Rabie

You are hereby requested to participate in a research study conducted by Cerise Rabie (MEdPsych) from the Department of Educational Psychology at Stellenbosch University as part of the requirements in completing a master's thesis in Educational Psychology.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you fit the profile of the type of participant required for the research study. In other words, you are a woman who become pregnant during your teenage years, you are currently older than 21 years and you no longer attend school.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to explore how early motherhood may have influenced the identity formation of a group of young women.

The study will be guided by the research question: **What influence did becoming a mother during adolescence have on the identity formation of a group of women in a low socio-economic community?**

To fully explore the research question, the following supplementary questions will be explored:

- How do the women view themselves?
- How did early motherhood influence their identity formation?
- Which intrinsic and extrinsic variables have assisted or hindered them in navigating their lives?

2. WHAT WILL BE ASKED OF ME?

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to:

- complete and sign this consent form; and
- to participate in an online individual interview and projective techniques concerning the theme identified above. This will take approximately 45 – 60 minutes.

Subsequently, you will be given the opportunity to decide whether you would like to participate in two online focus group discussions involving six to eight participants in discussion about various themes regarding early motherhood, identity, and resilience. Projective techniques (such as collage, clay modelling and 'Photovoice') will also be used during the online focus group discussions. Each of the two online focus group discussions will take approximately 60 – 90 minutes.

The online interviews and focus group will be conducted at times convenient for you during October - November 2020.

You will also be requested to indicate your availability to clarify or confirm information shared during the online individual interview and/or focus group, via electronic correspondence or telephonically, should the need arise.

3. POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Should you experience discomfort as a consequence of your participation in this study, I have arranged for [REDACTED] a Clinical Psychologist based in Somerset West, to be available to consult with you. Ms [REDACTED] can be contacted on [REDACTED]. The services provided [REDACTED] Arendse will be free of charge and the researcher will pay the transportation costs / data costs if the sessions take place online.

4. POSSIBLE BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO THE SOCIETY

Sharing experiences with others can be a cathartic process. The study hopes to create a safe space for women to share their experiences of early motherhood and how this may have affected their identity formation. These shared experiences and ways of knowing may inspire others to explore their own lived realities and enhance their self-awareness and acknowledgement of their resilience. Although it may not be possible to generalise the insights gained, I hope that by using an open and collaborative approach, the knowledge gained may be useful to others in similar situations.

5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

No remuneration will be provided for the participation in the study. The researcher will however cover the costs associated with participation in the study, which includes data costs, transport costs and the costs of the materials that will be used in data collection.

6. PROTECTION OF YOUR INFORMATION, CONFIDENTIALITY AND IDENTITY

Any information you share with the researcher during this study that could possibly identify you as a participant, will be protected, remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law.

Confidentiality will be ensured through the use pseudonyms and the removal of any identifying information. Online interviews and focus group discussions will be audio-recorded and/or video-recorded (with your permission) and you will have the right to review the transcripts and recordings that pertain to your participation in the study. The audio and/or video tapes will be kept on a password encrypted USB drive and on Microsoft OneDrive, to which only the researcher and supervisor has access. All paper data, including the 'River of Life' and 'Photovoice' activity, will be kept in a locked cabinet, only accessed by the researcher and supervisor. The information generated in this research may be used for publication in academic peer reviewed journals and may be presented at an academic conference.

7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. You may withdraw your consent at any time.

8. RESEARCHERS' CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact Ms Cerise Rabie, the main researcher, at [REDACTED] or email [REDACTED] and/or the supervisor, Dr Lynne Damons at [REDACTED].

9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact Ms [REDACTED] at the Division for Research Development.

DECLARATION OF CONSENT BY THE PARTICIPANT

As the participant I, confirm that:

- The above information is written and explained to me in a language which I understand.
- I had the opportunity to read the information and ask questions about concepts that were unclear to me. Unclear concepts were explained to me.
- All issues related to privacy, and the confidentiality and use of the information I provide, have been explained.
- I understand that I will need to provide personal details, thoughts, experiences, feelings and memories.

I know that the researcher will voice/video record and keep notes of the interview and focus group sessions. I have also given my permission that the notes and voice/video recordings may be discussed with the supervisor of the study. I also understand that my contributions will be respected by the researcher and the supervisor.

I have put my name on this paper to show that I agree to take part in the online individual interviewing and online focus group sessions.

By signing below, I _____ (*name of participant*) agree to take part in this research study, as conducted by Cerise Rabie (*name of principal investigator*).

Signature of Participant

Date

DECLARATION BY THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

As the **principal investigator**, I, Cerise Rabie, hereby declare that the information contained in this document has been thoroughly explained to the participant. I also declare that the participant has been encouraged (and has been given ample time) to ask any questions. In addition, I would like to select the following option:

	The conversation with the participant was conducted in a language in which the participant is fluent.
	The conversation with the participant was conducted with the assistance of an interpreter (who has signed a non-disclosure agreement), and this consent form is available to the participant in a language in which the participant is fluent.

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

Appendix C: Psychologist's Letter

To whom it may concern

I, [REDACTED] a registered Clinical Psychologist, herewith acknowledge that I have agreed to avail my professional services, on a pro bono basis, to any of the participants in Ms Rabie's research community who may experience an adverse response to participating in the study. Each participant will be entitled to 6 – 8 pro bono sessions. I do hereby give permission to Ms Rabie to give out my contact details to participants who would need the abovementioned support services. My email address is [REDACTED] and appointments can be made

I further acknowledge that Ms Rabie is a Master's degree student in Educational Psychology at Stellenbosch University. I am aware that the study is titled "*Exploring the identity formation experiences of a group of women who became mothers during adolescence*" and that the participants are women older than 21 years, who have become mothers during adolescence.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]
Clinical Psychologist (PS [REDACTED])

Appendix D: Institutional Permission



NOTICE OF APPROVAL

REC: Social, Behavioural and Education Research (SBER) - Initial Application Form

20 October 2020

Project number: [REDACTED]

Project Title: Exploring the identity formation experiences of a group of women who became mothers during adolescence

Dear Miss Cerise Rabie

Your REC: Social, Behavioural and Education Research (SBER) - Initial Application Form submitted on 9 September 2020 was reviewed and approved by the REC: Social, Behavioural and Education Research (REC: SBE).

Please note below expiration date of this approved submission:

Ethics approval period:

Protocol approval date (Humanities)	Protocol expiration date (Humanities)
20 October 2020	19 October 2021

GENERAL REC COMMENTS PERTAINING TO THIS PROJECT:

INVESTIGATOR RESPONSIBILITIES

Please take note of the General Investigator Responsibilities attached to this letter. You may commence with your research after complying fully with these guidelines.

If the researcher deviates in any way from the proposal approved by the REC: SBE, the researcher must notify the REC of these changes.

Please use your SU project number [REDACTED] on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your project.

Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

CONTINUATION OF PROJECTS AFTER REC APPROVAL PERIOD

You are required to submit a progress report to the REC: SBE before the approval period has expired if a continuation of ethics approval is required. The Committee will then consider the continuation of the project for a further year (if necessary).

Once you have completed your research, you are required to submit a final report to the REC: SBE for review.

Included Documents:

Document Type	File Name	Date	Version
Letter of support_counselling	5.3. Psychologist Letter for support services	22/02/2020	1
Default	RESPONSE LETTER - 28.04.2020	28/04/2020	1
Default	RESPONSE LETTER - 27.07.2020	27/07/2020	1
Data collection tool	5.4. Interview Guide 1 - Individual Online Interview 04.09.2020	04/09/2020	2
Data collection tool	5.4. Onderhoudsgids 1 - Individuele Aanlyn Onderhoud 04.09.2020	04/09/2020	2
Data collection tool	5.5. Interview Guide 2 - First Online Focusgroup Discussion 04.09.2020	04/09/2020	2
Data collection tool	5.5. Onderhoudsgids 2 - Eerste Aanlyn Fokusgroepsessie 04.09.2020	04/09/2020	2
Data collection tool	5.6. Interview Guide 3 - Second online Focusgroup Discussion 04.09.2020	04/09/2020	2
Data collection tool	5.6. Onderhoudsgids 3 - Tweede aanlyn Fokusgroepsessie 04.09.2020	04/09/2020	2

Appendix E: Interview Guide: Individual Online Interview

Online Individual semi-structured interview Session 1

Exploring the identity formation experiences of a group of women who became mothers during adolescence

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. As mentioned previously, I am hoping to learn about your experiences and life as a woman who experienced early motherhood and how that has affected your identity and sense of resilience. I am excited to hear your stories!

- a) Purpose of the interview*
- b) Confidentiality and anonymity*
- c) Format of the interview*
- d) Negotiating the use of recording equipment*
- e) Clarification and questions*

The following questions will be used to probe themes:

Autobiographical and demographic information

1. What is your current age?
2. What was it like growing up in Ukomelela?
3. Describe the world outside your door.
4. What were the biggest challenges of growing up in Ukomelela?
5. What do people do for fun in Ukomelela?
6. What do community members say about Ukomelela? (What must happen to make the community better?)
7. What do you think outsiders say about Ukomelela?

Early motherhood

1. With whom did you grow up?
2. At what age did your mother have her first child? (*At what age did your mother have you?*)
3. To your knowledge, was that pregnancy planned?
4. What are your thoughts on teenage pregnancy?
5. At what age did you have your first sexual encounter?
6. Where did you learn about sex and pregnancy? (*School, home, friends*)
7. What was your experience of sex and sexual education at school?
8. Who should teach young people about sex?
9. At what age did you become pregnant?

10. What was your initial reaction when you found out that you were pregnant?
11. How did your parents/guardians react when they found out about your pregnancy?
12. How did the father react when you told him that you were pregnant?
13. How did people close to you (grandparents, aunts and uncles, friends, community members) react when they found out about your pregnancy?
14. How did these people's reactions affect the way you saw yourself / felt about your situation?
15. What support did you receive during your pregnancy and afterwards?
16. In your opinion, what must happen for teenage pregnancy to be reduced?

Identity

1. How did you see yourself before you became pregnant?
 - a. What influenced the way you saw yourself?
2. How did your view of yourself change after you found out that you were pregnant?
 - a. What influenced the way you see yourself now?
3. How does your family see you now?
 - a. How has this influenced the way you see yourself?
4. How does your family and community view the father of your child?
5. How would your friends describe you?
 - a. How has this influenced the way you see yourself?
6. How do you think people in your community would describe you?
 - a. How has this influenced the way you see yourself?

Resilience

Resilience refers to how well a person can adapt to stressful events in his/her life, such as teenage pregnancy. A person with good resilience has the ability to bounce back more quickly and with less stress than someone whose resilience is less developed.

1. What does resilience mean to you?
2. How would you describe a resilient person?
3. Teenage pregnancy can be considered a stressful life occurrence. What factors helped you to cope during this time?
4. What did you learn about yourself during this time?
5. In what ways do you think you were resilient in your life?
6. If you think about your life thus far and all the things you have faced, do you consider yourself a resilient person? Why? (Can you give examples?)

River of Life activity

We are going to use a creative way for you to document your lived experience. We will do the “River of Life” activity. The purpose of this activity is to outline your personal life story, which should ideally contain important information about your life, the way you see yourself, your experience of early motherhood and in what ways you were resilient.

Our lives can be compared to the flow of a river. Sometimes the river runs deep and is full of water, gushing over the banks; other times the river is almost dry. Our lives too have high points and low points. In rivers there can be waterfalls, rapids, boulders or still ponds. Our lives also have turbulent times, things that prevent us from reaching our full potential. In life, just like in nature, there is beauty and a silver lining among the dark clouds.

*I want you to use the materials provided and take about 10 minutes to **draw your life story as a river**. You can add rocks, streams, waterfalls, clouds, the sun, grass, the desert, etc. Think about why you are adding these different elements and what they mean to you.*

The participant will be asked to think about the course of her life. She will be asked to reflect on the following questions:

1. What significant things happened in your life that shaped the way you think of yourself?
2. Are there boulders – obstacles or life-altering moments – that obstruct your river?
3. When does your river flow at its strongest?
4. What relationships have been most significant at different points in your life?
5. Who has most shaped you? Why?
6. Were there times of significant pain or suffering that shaped the flow of your life river?
7. What do you regard as the strengths in your story?
8. What do you see as the negative aspects of your story?

Appendix F: Interview Guide: Online Focus Group Discussion

First online focus group session Session 2

Exploring the identity formation experiences of a group of women who became mothers during adolescence

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. As mentioned previously, I am hoping to learn about your experiences and life as a woman who experienced early motherhood and how that has affected your identity and sense of resilience. I am excited to hear your stories!

- a) Introduce self*
- b) Purpose of the first focus group session*
- c) Confidentiality and anonymity*
- d) Format of the session*
- e) Negotiating the use of recording equipment*
- f) Clarification and questions*

Thank you all for being present and willing to participate in this study. In this study we will be dealing with three concepts: 1. Early motherhood, 2. Identity and 3. Resilience.

- 1. Early motherhood can be defined as a woman under the age of 18 who falls pregnant and bears a child/children. This includes young women below the age of 12.*
- 2. Identity encompasses personal characteristics, beliefs about oneself, roles in relation to others and membership of social groups. Essentially it is who you are as a person and how you see yourself.*
- 3. Resilience refers to the concept of being able to bounce back after suffering adversity in your life. Resilience promotes healthier outcomes following stressful times and leads to personal well-being.*

Clay activity

Our first activity will be to introduce ourselves to one another – to give us a little glimpse into our worlds.

The participants will be asked to use clay to build something that represents themselves and their journey through early motherhood. This will be used to stimulate discussion and will help to introduce the participants to the group.

Thank you kindly for participating.

You have been presented with three different colours of clay. Please use one or all of the colours to make a model or tell a story that represents your experiences of early motherhood.

Once you have completed your model, we will walk around the room and you will introduce yourselves to one another and share part of your story with the help of your clay objects. You are welcome to elaborate on why you chose to make the object you did and what significance it has for you and your journey.

Remember, you are not making works of art for a competition, so do not worry too much about whether you are doing it right. There is no right or wrong.

At the end of this session I will ask the participants to share their experience of this activity.

Collage activity

The purpose of this activity is for the participants to reflect on their own and others' stories together. The participants will then be presented with chart paper, magazines, markers, scissors and craft glue and will be asked to create a collage on the common themes they have heard during the introduction session.

Next, I would like you to consider one another's stories and journeys of early motherhood and the effect it had on your identities. I want you to design, a collage with your clippings and markers to illustrate the three concepts of 'early motherhood', 'identity' and 'resilience'.

At the end, each member will have a few minutes to explain their collage to the others.

I will again ask the participants to reflect on the process and experience of doing this collage activity.

Photovoice introduction activity

Photovoice will be explained to the participants so that they will be able to use it. Due to the collaborative nature of action research, the participants will be able to choose between using Photovoice or collage as a means of expression. They will be asked to collect photos/images/words concerning their experiences of navigating adolescent motherhood and how it may have influenced their identity and contributed to resilience.

**Second online focus group session
Session 3**

**Exploring the identity formation experiences of a group of women who became mothers during
adolescence**

Introduction

Thank you for coming to our last meeting. I deeply appreciate your time, effort and willingness to afford me the opportunity to enter your personal worlds. Your stories have truly been inspiring!

- a) *Purpose of the second focus group session*
- b) *Confidentiality and anonymity*
- c) *Format of the session*
- d) *Negotiating the use of recording equipment*
- e) *Clarification and questions*

Poster activity:

As a final activity, we will collectively develop posters in which we share advice and guidance for young girls who may find themselves in a similar situation as well as resources that can help them navigate the journey and plan for the future. (I will print the posters and give it to the women to distribute in the community).

I really appreciate your participation in this study and your openness to let me hear your stories. I believe that your contributions will have a positive impact on your community and that by sharing your lived experiences, other women in similar circumstances will be encouraged. Thank you once again! Your insights and participation were of immeasurable value.

Appendix G: Physical Activity Guide

'River of Life'

People's lives can be compared to the flow of a river. Sometimes the river runs deep and is full of water, gushing over the banks, other times the river is almost dry. People's lives too have high points and low points. In rivers there can be waterfalls, rapids, boulders or still ponds. Our lives also have turbulent times, things that prevent us from reaching our full potential. In life, just like in nature, there is beauty and a silver lining among the dark clouds. The purpose of the 'River of Life' activity is to outline each participant's personal life story which should ideally contain valuable information about their life, the way they see themselves, their experience of early motherhood and in what ways they were resilient. Materials will be provided for participants to **draw their life story as a river**.

Clay Modelling

Participants will be asked to **use clay to build something that represent themselves** and their journey through early motherhood. This will be used to stimulate discussion and help to introduce participants to the group. Participants will be presented with three different colours of clay to make a model that represents their experiences of early motherhood. The clay model will serve as a way to introduce members and to share parts of their story with the group.

Collage

Participants will be presented with chart paper, magazines, scissors and craft glue and will be asked to create a collage around the common themes they have heard during the introduction (clay modelling) session. Participants will be asked to illustrate the three concepts of "early motherhood", "identity" and "resilience" in the form of collages.

Poster Activity

As a final activity, participants will collectively develop the wording of a poster in which they share advice and guidance for young mothers who may find themselves in a similar situation; identify resources that can help them navigate the journey and plan for the future.

Appendix H: Transcript with Thematic Colour Coding: Online Individual Interview

Colour Key:

Resilience	Motherhood	Community	Identity
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<p>ONDERHOUDVOERDER: Dink jy, jy sou dit waardeer het as sy met jou gesit en gesels het oor hierdie goed of dink jy ...[tussenbeide]</p> <p>DEELNEMER 3: Ek sou.</p> <p>ONDERHOUDVOERDER: ... jy sou nie geluister het nie?</p> <p>DEELNEMER 3: Ek sou. As my ma meer betrokke gewees het in my lewe, dan sou, ek glo dan sou dinge anders gewees het vandag.</p> <p>ONDERHOUDVOERDER: En dan, [naam], op watter ouderdom het jy seksueel aktief geraak?</p> <p>DEELNEMER 3: Op 15 jaar oud. 15 jaar, 15 jaar oud.</p> <p>ONDERHOUDVOERDER: Het jy ooit enige middels gebruik soos contraceptives?</p> <p>DEELNEMER 3: Geen, ek het niks gebruik nie.</p> <p>ONDERHOUDVOERDER: Dink jy dat daar genoeg inligting vandag daar buite is vir jongmense om hierdie middels in die hande te kry of dink jy hulle is bang om kliniek toe te gaan?</p> <p>DEELNEMER 3: Ek dink hulle is net bang om kliniek toe te gaan oor die stigma, want soos ek sê die plek waar ons in bly, as 'n mens kliniek toe gaan, daar is altyd gerugte wat 'n mens hoor. Elke persoon wat inkom, dan het mense iets te sê van daai persoon. Die persoon kom vir die. Daai persoon kom vir daai. Wat verkeerd is en hulle maak dit nie, hulle maak nie 'n geheim daarvan nie. Hulle maak nie 'n geheim nie. Dis hoekom die kinders is bang om kliniek toe te gaan.</p> <p>ONDERHOUDVOERDER: Dan wil ek ook by jou hoor, ons praat nou baie van opvoeding en wat tieners by die skool leer van seks en swangerskap en HIV. Wie se verantwoordelikheid dink jy is dit om die kinders op te voed oor hierdie?</p> <p>DEELNEMER 3: Ek dink dis die ouers en die onderwysers se plig om die kinders op te voed.</p> <p>ONDERHOUDVOERDER: 'n Spanpoging?</p> <p>DEELNEMER 3: Ja.</p> <p>ONDERHOUDVOERDER: En toe jy op 19 uitgevind het jy is swanger, [naam], hoe het jy gevoel? Hoe het jy reageer?</p> <p>DEELNEMER 3: Ek het, ek het gedink, ek het baie swaar grootgeraak. En vir my was dit gewees dat die persoon wat, my kind se pa, hy het 'n baie goeie werk. En al wat ek kon gedink het, is net aan die geld. Hy sal vir my help dat ek vir my kan dinge koop in die huis en wat ek nodig het, want my pa is al dood toe ek nog klein was en niemand het gewerk in die huis nie. So vir my was dit meer oor die geld gewees wat hy vir my kan gee.</p> <p>ONDERHOUDVOERDER: En dan hoe het jou ma reageer en jou familie reageer toe jy vir hulle sê jy is swanger?</p> <p>DEELNEMER 3: Daar was nie eintlik, dit was nie eintlik 'n groot ding gewees nie. Wat ek nie vandag kan verstaan nie, maar hoekom het niemand rêrig geworry nie, want ek kan gemaak en gedoen het net wat ek wou gedoen het.</p> <p>ONDERHOUDVOERDER: So kom dit weer terug by die, wat jy vroeër gesê het van, as hulle 'n bietjie meer betrokke was by jou lewe, sou dinge dalk kon anders wees?</p> <p>DEELNEMER 3: Ja, presies.</p> <p>ONDERHOUDVOERDER: En dan toe die pa van jou eerste kind, toe jy vir hom sê, wat was sy reaksie gewees?</p> <p>DEELNEMER 3: Hy het dit aanvaar, want dit was sy eerste kind gewees.</p>	<p>Community (Teenage pregnancy) – lack of parental involvement (found in literature)</p> <p>Community - Despondent outcomes – retrospection (hope)</p> <p>Community – lack of contraceptive use (also found in literature)</p> <p>Community – stigmatization and gossip surrounding contraceptive use (also found in literature)</p> <p>Community (Education surrounding teenage pregnancy) – whose responsibility is it?</p> <p>Collaboration between stakeholders (found in literature)</p> <p>Identity - Childhood Identity (poverty)</p> <p>Community – financial constraints – reasons why girls may get pregnant (found in literature)</p> <p>Motherhood – parents' reaction to pregnancy (indifference)</p> <p>Retrospection</p> <p>Community – lack of parental involvement (found in literature)</p> <p>Motherhood – child's father's reaction to the pregnancy</p>
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Appendix I: Transcript with Thematic Colour Coding: Focus Group

Colour Key: Resilience Motherhood Community Identity

<p>DEELNEMER 3: Dit is.</p> <p>DEELNEMER 1: As ek nou in 'n werk is of whatever, ek sal nie daar gewees het as [naam] nie. Ek moet eers myself wees. En ek glo ...[onduidelik], want nou is ek, ek. Yes. [lag] Ja. So yes, guys. En ek wens dit vir almal wat ...[onduidelik] om uit te vind wie jy rêrig is.</p> <p>DEELNEMER 4: En jy het uitgevind wie jy rêrig is.</p> <p>DEELNEMER 1: Yes, en dit het baie mooi ...[onduidelik]. Soms dan gebeur goed met 'n mens in die lewe, nè, en as die goed so gebeur, dan voel jy, nie jy voel nie, jy is gebore, jy het 'n goeie hart. Jy wil net speel en gelukkig wees daai kind. Hy hardloop in die rondte. O, alles is net lekker, jy weet. Nou gebeur seer dinge met jou. Nou beginne jy inkrimp en jy limit jousef. Moenie daar gaan nie. Jy gaan seerkry. Die gaan gebeur. As ek nou iets gaan doen, gaan ek pak kry, jy weet. So jou brein vorm ook op so 'n manier. Maar op die einde van die dag kan jy nie so doodgaan nie. Jy moet weer tot op 'n punt kom waar jy kom beseef wie jy rêrig is, watter soorte mens jy rêrig is. Apart van daai seer en daai kwaad en daai bittergeit wat die goete nou aan 'n mens gedoen het, wie is jy, jy jousef? Verstaan jy? Jy lê in jou kooi en jy vra vir jousef, wie is ek? Wat sien jy?</p> <p>DEELNEMER 5: Ja, ek moet ook nog myself vind.</p> <p>ONDERHOUDVOERDER: En hoe dink julle doen 'n mens dit? Hoe vind jy jousef?</p> <p>DEELNEMER 1: Dis 'n hele proses. Dit gebeur nie oornag nie. Dit gaan met 'n klomp trane gepaard, glo my. Dit gaan met 'n klomp waar jy voel like ek sal beter af gewees het as ek dood moet gewees het.</p> <p>DEELNEMER 3: Ja.</p> <p>DEELNEMER 1: Daar is baie dae, even die jaar wat ek gevoel het, kyk hier, suicide, hier kom ek. Ja wat en dan vandag dink ek, Here, al die mense hier buite sien 'n sterk vrou, maar ek sien niks en laas jaar toe is ek op pad Usave toe. En ek hoor 'n stem sê vir my, jy is 'n baie ongelukkige meisiekind.</p> <p>Ek is like, nee wag, dis dan so 'n lekker dag. Wie het dan nou lus vir ongelukkig wees? Ek kom hier by die huis. Ek sit, ek sit. Ek doen wat ek moet doen vir my kinders en what not. Hey, maar toe hier raak die nou aand. Hier moet ek nou slaap. Daar kom so 'n ongelukkigheid oor my. Daai is nou die Here daai. Hy wag tot jy rustig raak. En ek beginne huil en ek beginne skreeu en ek beginne huil. En ek kan nie verstaan nou, wat gaan dan nou hier aan?</p> <p>En hy wys my, ek was vyf jaar oud. Ek was in die Karoo by my pa se suster en sy het laat ek op die stoep sit daar. My ouma en my oupa het 'n hoë stoep gehad. Nou julle weet mos hoe is die Sondag. Kyk hier, die son skroei vir jou. 40 degrees. Dan sit ek op daai stoep. Ek kan nie in die huis sit nie. Ek kan ook nie met haar kinders speel nie. Ek moet net daar sit. Of dit nou reën en of die son skyn, jy sit op daai stoep. Toe het ek mos nou sere ook gekry op my liggaam. Dan vat sy die rooi baksteen en dan maak sy dis mos nou fyn en dan gooi hulle water. En dan smeer hulle vir jou mos daarmee, nè. My pa en my ma bring vir my nuwe klere. Haar kind dra eerste die klere. [naam] is twee jaar ouer as ek. Sy dra eerste my klere en dan wanneer sy dit klaar gedra het, moeg gedra het, dan gee sy die klere vir my. Ek is nou 36 jaar oud. Wanneer kom daai, die jaar. Ek loop nou my hele lewe lank, 31 jaar loop ek met daai depressie, daai rejection, daai isolation. Ek is deur – julle sal sien, ek is altyd alleen. So ek het gestrugle om aan te pas by ander mense. Ek loop 35 jaar, 31 jaar met daai</p>	<p>Identity – who am I?</p> <p>Identity – knowing who I am (redemptive identity)</p> <p>Community – difficulties during childhood</p> <p>Identity – childhood identity – life before pregnancy</p> <p>Identity – things happen that change you</p> <p>Identity - Internalising hurt and pain</p> <p>Resilience – hope for the future</p> <p>Identity – redemptive identity</p> <p>Identity – who am I? / search for identity</p> <p>Not a quick fix – identity takes time to develop</p> <p>Mental health difficulties (suicide)</p> <p>Current identity (how others view you)</p> <p>Identity as a mother (responsibility to nurture and take care)</p> <p>Mental health struggles</p> <p>Internalisation of childhood trauma</p> <p>Mental health struggles</p>
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