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Exploring Adolescent Resilience During COVID-19 in a South African Township Context

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Abstract

Abstract

COVID-19 has permeated news since December 2019 and has impacted all areas of life. Despite widespread coverage of COVID-related risks, there is limited understanding of adolescent resilience in Global South contexts (e.g., Africa) and against the backdrop of COVID-19. We, therefore, conducted a qualitative secondary analysis of 79 documents (i.e., drawings and written explanations) generated by school-attending adolescents in grades eight to ten in Zamdela, South Africa, during 2020 lockdown. Using a multisystemic resilience approach, we explored what these documents revealed as resilience enabling for adolescents in a township context during COVID-19. The thematic findings highlight the importance of personal resources, complemented by relational resources and very occasionally, resources in young people's physical ecology. These findings reinforce that resilience is more than a set of personal strengths and reminds us that individual capacity for resilience is pertinent when contextual and temporal dynamics such as resource constraints and lockdown conditions prevail.

Keywords

Resilience, Adolescence, COVID-19 Lockdown, Multisystemic Resilience, Township, South Africa

Introduction

Resilience is the ability to function adaptively (e.g., continue to attend school) despite challenging circumstances (Masten & Motti-Stefanidi, 2020; Zhu et al., 2022). Mostly, young people function adaptively in the face of adversity because they have access to resources within themselves (e.g., hopeful agency or constructive meaning-making) and their lifeworld (e.g., their family system or built environment) (Masten et al., 2021; Sanders et al., 2017). For the most part, studies investigating the resources that support young people to show resilience have been conducted in North American and European contexts and have neglected the viewpoints of those in majority world or developing contexts, including African communities (Blum & Boyden, 2018; Theron & Ungar, 2023). Since resilience-enabling factors are contextually responsive (Ungar & Theron, 2020), it is necessary to understand what resources are meaningful to adolescents outside of these well-researched contexts (Beames, et al., 2021; Liebenberg & Scherman, 2021). This study speaks to that need. It reports the insights of a sample of adolescents living in Zamdela township in South Africa regarding the resources that they experienced as resilience-enabling during COVID-19 lockdown 2020.

To do so, we report a secondary analysis of the qualitative data generated in the Resilient Youth in Stressed Environments (RYSE)–Russia and South Africa (RYSE-RuSA) study. Like the original RYSE study (Ungar et al., 2021), the RYSE-RuSA study investigated how different systems support resilience among adolescents living in stressed communities (e.g., communities that are vulnerable to economic volatility/indigence, violence, or physical degradation). This investigation included adolescents' lived experiences of which resources – from any system – had supported them to function adaptively. From a multisystemic resilience perspective (Ungar & Theron, 2020), adaptive functioning is co-facilitated by resources that are distributed across many systems, including biological, psychological, social, institutional, and physical ecology (built/natural environment) ones. Knowing which resources adolescents themselves have experienced as resilience-enabling will support mental health practitioners, service providers, and policy makers to better advance adolescent resilience (Liebenberg & Scherman, 2021).

Stressed township communities

Despite there being some resilience resources available in a township, there are numerous risks associated with them (Maringira & Gibson, 2019). Townships are characteristically underdeveloped living areas and were established to house people of colour during apartheid in South Africa (Du Toit et al., 2018). They are typically characterised by transmissible illnesses, poor employment opportunities, poor infrastructure, rapid population growth rates, high levels of unemployment, cramped living spaces, and the

establishment of small illegal bars known as shebeens (Christodoulou et al., 2019; Du Toit et al., 2018). Additionally, townships are generally associated with poor neighbourhoods (Moloi, 2018), poor or non-existent service delivery, overcrowding, high rates of violence, and with few structural resources available for young people living in the area (Moloi, 2018). Additionally, those living in township contexts face the risks of violence and food insecurity (Christodoulou et al., 2019). South African townships are characterised by these same adverse contexts, regardless of where in the country they are located (Haffejee & Levine, 2020; Moloi, 2018). In townships, there is a great likelihood of youth engaging in gang violence, substance abuse, and criminal behaviour and of receiving a poor-quality education (Bantjes et al., 2019; Breen et al., 2019).

COVID-19 added to the challenges typically associated with township life (Turok & Visagie, 2021). Despite various changes to the lockdown rules as lockdown levels varied, South Africans had to wear masks in public, wash or sanitise their hands, and maintain social distancing throughout the lockdown period in which data was generated and that spanned March to December 2020 (Zuma, 2020). This period was characterised by increased hunger, job loss and unemployment, education inequality, and a general decline in mental health (Spaull et al., 2020). The initial lockdown regulations affected where and when people could move around (Fouché et al., 2020), there was a limit to the number of people allowed at gatherings, schools were closed (along with the National School Nutrition programme as Haffejee and Levine (2020) pointed out), and gatherings in public places (such as parks) were prohibited (Government of South Africa, 2021a). Of great concern, too, was the recognition that school closures meant many learners had lost access to school meals and this placed even greater pressure on strained family resources (Spaull et al., 2020). All of these challenges were pronounced in the resource-constrained, congested context of townships (Turok & Visagie, 2021).

Given all this and the uncertainty associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, there was an increased risk that adolescents' mental health would deteriorate during lockdown (Beames et al., 2021; Laxton, 2021). Additionally, since adolescents place high emphasis on peer relationships, the restrictions pertaining to social distancing were also found to have altered young people's relationships through the conditions imposed by physical distancing. In addition, the stigma attached to having contracted the virus added to this risk of deteriorating mental health (Tomlinson et al., 2021). Additionally, with COVID-19 restrictions impacting the amount of physical activity in which adolescents were able to engage, there was also the risk attached to being increasingly sedentary that has been linked to a negative impact on both the physical and mental wellbeing of adolescents (Derigny et al., 2022).

Adolescent resilience in township contexts

Early international studies focused on European and North American contexts (Yoon et al., 2019), but there have been some advancements in resilience research in an African context and, with this, there has been a move towards a socio-ecological and systemic understanding of resilience (Theron et al., 2020). While there have been some studies of adolescent resilience in the context of South African townships (e.g., Maringira & Gibson, 2019; Singh & Naicker, 2019), they typically focused on personal, relational and/or educational resources. Prior to COVID-19, a review of resilience studies showed that personal and relational resources were the most prominent resources reported by South African young people (Van Breda & Theron, 2018). During COVID-19 lockdown, young South African people still found ways to enact personal agency to create a sense of normalcy. They did this through meeting up with others, and going on other social outings (Gittings et al., 2021).

While immediate or extended family members often provided social and other supports (Höltge et al., 2021), other adults (who might not be blood relatives, e.g., teachers or neighbours) have also been identified as key resilience resources for South African adolescents (Theron & Van Rensburg, 2020). Research has also drawn attention to the specific attachment of many South African youths to female authority figures in their lives (Ungar & Theron, 2020), possibly because so many households are female headed (Maringira & Gibson, 2019). In addition, it must be noted that, in contexts where social ecologies are stressed and resource-constrained (e.g., township contexts), young people may have to rely more, or mostly, on personal resources to thrive (Singh & Naicker, 2019; Van Breda & Theron, 2018).

Although not as prominently reported as personal and relational resources, studies documenting the resilience of township adolescents do make some mention of physical ecological resources. For example, a study with youth living in eMbalenhle township, Mpumalanga (Theron et al., 2022) reported that the local community hall and adjacent exercise centre were important resources. Youth appreciated how these built environment resources provided opportunity for constructive downtime and healthy social interaction. Similarly, other studies have highlighted physical ecological resources which young people identified as resilience-enabling by providing them a space to feel safe in. These resources included libraries (Nissen et al., 2020), schools, churches (DaViera et al., 2020; Scorgie et al., 2017) and parks (Feng et al., 2022; Li et al., 2021). There is, however, a history of physical ecological resources being under-reported by young people living in resource-constrained environments such as a township (Van Breda & Theron, 2018).

Some studies highlighting the importance of institutional resources for adolescent resilience have also been noted. For example, these studies typically include how support from educational institutions (Sanders et al.,

2017), community centres, or faith-based organisations (Ungar & Theron, 2020; Van Rensberg et al., 2018) aim to address not just physical and material needs but psychosocial and emotional needs too (Tam et al., 2021). Though often under-reported in South African studies of child and youth resilience (see review by Van Breda & Theron, 2018), Ubuntu or Ubuntu-related values that de-emphasise the individual and encourage interdependence are valued in sub-Saharan contexts and inform how institutions provide psychosocial support (Mangaliso et al., 2021; Van Breda, 2019).

Methods

In response to the question "What resilience-enabling resources were reported by adolescents living in a township context during 2020 COVID-19 lockdown?" we chose to conduct a secondary analysis of a dataset generated by township adolescents during 2020 lockdown. This saved on costs and time (see Ruggiano & Perry, 2019; Tarrant, 2017), and allowed us to re-use participant insights to answer new questions. Secondary analyses are warranted when they answer a question previously unasked of the data and/or provide new perspectives (Ruggiano & Perry, 2019). The original analysis was also resilience-focused but had a singular focus on the multisystemic resource combinations reported by adolescents with minimal versus elevated levels of depression; it mixed the longitudinal quantitative and qualitative data (Theron et al., 2023).

The primary study: A summary of its methodology

The primary study, Resilient Youth in Stressed Environments (RYSE)–Russia and South Africa (RYSE-RuSA) aimed to generate a comprehensive understanding of resilience among adolescents living in a stressed environment and to use that understanding to promote/sustain adolescent wellbeing (Theron et al., 2023). To achieve this aim, the RYSE-RuSA research team followed an iterative mixed methods approach and invited adolescent participants from stressed communities in South Africa (SA) and Russia to generate data on three occasions between 2020 and 2021. As this article reports the SA qualitative data generated at baseline, the remainder of this methodological synopsis focuses on SA and the qualitative baseline study.

Contextualisation

The context of the SA study was Sasolburg and its neighbouring township, Zamdela. In 1954, the petrol company Sasol established Zamdela to house their employees of colour (Moloi, 2018) working at their refinery in Sasolburg. Like other townships (see Christodoulou et al., 2019; Du Toit et al., 2018), Zamdela is characterised by poor infrastructure, poverty, high levels of unemployment, and poor service delivery (Rampedi, 2017; Statistics South Africa, n.d.). The residents of Sasolburg and Zamdela are further stressed by

pollution from adjacent extraction industries (e.g., Sasol's petrochemical plant and refinery, the Seriti coal mine that supplies the local power station, and associated trucking activity; (Hallowes & Munnik, 2020)) and by the economic precarity of these industries, given the fluctuating oil price and calls for renewable energy. Like other townships (Gittings et al., 2021; Turok & Visagie, 2021), Zamdela was seriously affected by COVID-19 challenges. Residents had little relief from lockdown-related economic challenges and limited opportunity to comply with COVID- related public health regulations.

Approximately 90,000 people live in Zamdela (Statistics South Africa, n.d.). The unemployment rate is about 43%, roughly 18% of residents live in informal settlements, and 35.5% of households are female headed (Resilient Youth in Stressed Environments, n.d.). Sesotho is the predominant language in the area, with IsiXhosa and isiZulu being the next widely spoken languages (Statistics South Africa, n.d.). In a visit to Zamdela in October 2021, President Cyril Ramaphosa commented on the poor state of the potholed roads as well as the poor service delivery in the area related to the provision of water and sewage and, along with the rest of the country, the issue of inadequate electricity supply was also noted as a problem in Zamdela (Khoza, 2021). Instances of gender-based violence (Kgongoane, 2022a), poor quality housing (Kgongoane, 2022b), and lawlessness (TIMESLIVE, 2022) are frequently reported for Zamdela.

Participants

The RYSE-RuSA team used purposive sampling to recruit. Local gatekeepers formed a study advisory committee and recommended using advertisements on social media and in local shops and schools to recruit participants. Eligibility was determined by age (15 to 24 years), English literacy, residence in Sasolburg or Zamdela, and (negative or positive) experience of the extraction industry (e.g., being laid off in times of economic decline; health challenges; bursary recipient).

As much of the data was generated during COVID-19 lockdown conditions, snowball sampling was also used. Participants were encouraged to invite others who fit the eligibility criteria. At Baseline, 302 adolescents between the ages of 15 and 23 (mean age: 17; SD=1.856) consented to participate in the qualitative study. Of these, 177 (mean age: 17; *SD*=1.734) self-identified as young women and 125 (mean age: 18; *SD*=1.9) self-identified as young men. Fewer (*n*=109) participants lived in Sasolburg (mean age: 16; *SD*=0.745); most (*n*=193 mean age: 18; *SD*=1.876) were from Zamdela.

Data generation

Participants used the draw-and-write method to share their experience of what supports adolescent resilience. Following Mitchell and colleagues

(2011), participants were invited to make a drawing of whatever had helped them to do well/be OK when life was hard and then explain their drawings in the form of a written response When lockdown levels precluded meeting with participants in person, the instructions were telephonically/virtually shared; participants used any paper/stationery at their disposal and then scanned/photographed their drawings and explanations and shared them with the research team via email/WhatsApp/short message service. When in person meetings were permissible, the research team provided A4 paper and a variety of stationery and photographed/scanned the completed drawings and explanations. All drawings and explanations were de-identified and stored in a password-protected online repository.

Ethics

The Ethics Committee of [IRB blinded for review] provided ethical clearance. All participants aged 18 and older provided informed written consent; young participants provided informed written assent and their parents/guardians added their written consent. All participants received modest compensation for their time (i.e., a supermarket shopping voucher). Those who shared data virtually also received a small amount of data.

The secondary analysis

The secondary analysis was specific to the data generated by school-attending (i.e., Grade 8-10) adolescents living in Zamdela. This data consisted of 91 documents (drawings and written explanations) that were generated by 79 participants (average age: 16; 47 adolescent girls; 32 adolescent boys).

We used reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) to make meaning of the data. RTA is often used in qualitative psychology studies and is more of a transtheoretical technique than a methodology (Braun & Clarke, 2022). RTA encourages cautious meaning-making that embraces participants' insights (relating to their lived experiences) and researchers' insights (relating to their knowledge of the phenomenon and positioning). The first author (SW) led this analysis. To this end, SW engaged in a deep and repetitive engagement with the data. In the course of doing so, she reflected on her personal positioning (i.e., a young white woman who grew up adjacent to a township in eSwatini) and metatheoretical perspectives/assumptions (i.e., guided by resilience theory, the expectation that adolescents living in Zamdela during COVID-19 would primarily rely on personal, relational, and institutional resources to foster their resilience) and how these were shaping her understanding of the resilience-enablers reported in the documents (Braun & Clarke, 2022). She labelled visual and narrative data (i.e., created open codes) that answered the research question (e.g., visual/narrative content about individuals who helped participants do well despite life's challenges was labelled as relational supports).

Guided by a multisystemic framework (see Ungar & Theron, 2020) that is aligned with Ungar's (2011) SETR framework (particularly the complexity principle), the primary author (SW) then combined summative thematic codes into potential thematic categories (see Braun & Clarke, 2006). For example, original definitions of the candidate themes structural and natural environment resources were better explained by the more comprehensive definition of physical ecological resources, and so they were combined into one candidate theme. SW also did a frequency count to keep track of which resources were more, or less, prominently reported. After the initial coding process, the second author (LT) critically considered both the open codes and thematic categories. SW and LT engaged in a consensus discussion about the isolated instances where LT understood the data a little differently. For example, following traditional African emphasis on the importance of relationships (Ramphele, 2012), LT conceptualised caring teachers and supportive clergy as a relational resource (albeit a more formal one than family/peer relationships); in comparison, SW had conceptualised these as institutional supports. Similarly, SW had included two drawings of houses as physical ecology supports, but LT pointed out that the explanations were focused on relational supports (i.e., the caring people who lived there). Drawing on guidance from Angell and colleagues (2015), SW and LT reached consensus that the written explanation and drawing content needed to combine to make meaning, with emphasis on the participant's explanation, and assigned these two instances to the relational theme. Following Braun and Clarke (2022), this discussion included reflections on how LT's positioning (i.e., a researcher who has been exploring African youth resilience for 20 years) played into the meaning she was making.

Thereafter, SW and LT presented the findings at a large national conference. The audience, which included multiple experienced African researchers and mental health practitioners, endorsed the findings.

Findings

We identified three themes: psychological strengths; supportive formal and informal relationships; and physical ecological resources. The majority of adolescent participants reported on at least one psychological strength that had enabled their resilience and some even reported on multiple psychological strengths. There was a preference of girls/young women for supportive relationships as being enabling of their resilience. Additionally, a limited number of adolescents reported physical ecological resources as being enabling of their resilience. We detail each theme next.

Psychological strengths predominate adolescent accounts of resilience

Almost three quarters (i.e., 56 of 79) of the adolescent participants attributed resilience to their personal capacity to take action and/or be hopeful. Although many boys/young men reported on personal resources or

psychological strengths that enabled their resilience (i.e., 22 of 56), the majority were girls/young women (i.e., 34 of 56). Typically, taking action included seeking help (e.g., asking for advice) and/or engaging in an activity that was soothing or distracting.

For example, Participant V061 (a boy) drew a picture of himself with a soccer ball and explained "The thing that has helped me to do well in life when I keep facing hard times is playing soccer. Playing soccer keeps me busy and entertained because I put my focus on it". Participant V079 (a boy) drew a picture of music, lyrics and a diary and explained that "Any time I feel bad I just write or listen to music… Listening to music really heals and reduces my anger and stress". In addition, participants used television, books, and extracurricular activities, such as debating, to keep busy and distract themselves. For example, Participant V064 (a girl) drew a picture of a television and explained that "TV is a little getaway for my mind and reality in my own way." Participant V215 also reported on how they "watch football and play video games" when they "are bored." Boredom was a significant challenge for many adolescents during COVID-19-related lockdown conditions as Bösselmann et al. (2021) have noted. Similarly, Participants V065 (a girl) avoided boredom and other hardship by, "Do[ing] debate, so that I cannot think a lot about what I am going through", VO-089 (also a girl), "Since I was a photographer I was able to get my mind off things".

[Insert Figure 1 here]

Participant V062 (a boy) drew a picture of himself and explained how seeking help had aided him to manage during challenging times and that one should "seek for good advice" in life. Similarly, participant VO72 (a girl) spoke to others and that brought relief. She wrote, "Venting out to my friends and family really helped." Participant VO76 (a girl) echoed this by saying how, when she had a problem, she would "go to someone whom [she would] feel comfortable talking to or trust and then [she would] tell the person what was wrong."

Taking action was also implicit in participants' hopeful future orientation. This included participants setting goals, believing in their ability to achieve these goals, and being engaged in education because of its potential to support future success. For example, Participant V089 (a girl) explained that "I believe if you are doing well in/with your schoolwork you can achieve anything in life". Additionally, Participant VO-065 (a girl) explained that to "...Get where [she] want[ed] to be" she would "study hard, achieve [her] goal to turn out the best [she] can be". Likewise, Participant VO-016 (a boy) drew a picture of a journey through the mountains and explained how there are "so many trials to pass through before [he] can make it to the top" and that these trials "are not here to harm [him] but to build [him]." Mirroring this positive

orientation to the future, Participant V094 (a girl) wrote, “At hard times I know what I want and I always believe that I will make it someday.”

Supportive formal and informal relationships also matter for adolescent resilience

Although personal strengths were most commonly reported, formal and informal relational supports were important too. Just over half the participants (i.e., 40 of 79) linked resilience to relational supports. This included access to more formal relational supports (e.g., experiences of being cared for by teachers, clergy or other adults who were not family, or being inspired by them) that were linked to institutions (e.g., schools, faith-based organisations) that adolescent participants had access to. It also included informal relational supports, with emphasis on family members (mostly mothers), and peers. Typically, these relationships provided emotional support (e.g., comfort, a sense of belonging) and informational support (e.g., advice) and passed on traditional African values (e.g., respect for elders, appreciation of spirituality). Interestingly, in our research, no participants reported on material support (e.g., money, clothing). As in the preceding theme, more young women (n=28) than young men (n=12) reported relational supports.

For example, Participant VO-084 (a girl) drew a picture of a school building; her explanation included reference to her school giving learners a sense of belonging: “It [school] has given me purpose in life and taught me about self-discipline and self-love… Being at school helped me to deal with anxiety… The school has made a lot of learners feel at home. It has been a place of love and kindness”. There were other references to institutions supporting relational opportunities that encouraged a sense of belonging, including how to treat others in ways that communicated that they mattered. For example, Participant V085 (a boy) drew a picture of a church and explained, “Church has helped me with many things like being faithful and showing respect to others”. Participant V071 (a girl) also reflected this view in writing that “it [church] has taught me respect and caring for people”. Finally, Participant VO-090 (a girl) drew a picture of a community centre and reported on how attending a project there had enabled her resilience because “... the speakers really motivate me and they help me to improve my self-esteem”.

For the most part, though, participants drew family members and explained how these relations were key to their resilience. Participant V083 (a boy) drew his family and his environment and explained how “My drawing simply means in every bad or sticky situation, my parents are always there for me. Even though my environment or society is not friendly I always depend on my parents”. Similarly, Participant V094 wrote, “I am so happy that I have the most supporting family who always motivate me and advise”. Participant V084 (a girl) drew a picture of various things that helped enable her resilience - including a depiction of her and her grandmother - and explained that her “…grandmother was always there to support and [offer] advices”. Similarly,

Participant VO-083 (a girl) drew a picture of her with her sister and explained how her sister "...made me feel like I'm the most special girl ever. My sister has always had my back like nobody's business". Participants' references to their parents and other family members supporting their resilience sometimes included the desire to reciprocate and/or their gratitude to and respect for these kin. For example, Participant VO-048 (a girl) drew a picture of her mother and included, "I can't wait 'til I'm financially stable so that I can spoil her. We argue but I'll never disrespect her".

[Insert Figure 2 here]

Physical ecology resources are rarely mentioned

A very limited number (i.e., only 5 of 79) of participants drew physical ecological resources and made reference to how these resources helped them to cope well with challenging circumstances. When they did, these resources were typically green spaces/parks and safe built spaces that were generally found in a participant's immediate environment. They offered a sense of peace, security, escape and/or enabled a sense of wellbeing. Girls (n =4) and boys (n =1) reported on these resilience resources.

Participant V217 (a girl) drew a library and reported on it being a building that brings comfort. She wrote, "When I am hurt, I always go to the library in my community so that I can feel better." In contrast, the other participants drew outdoor spaces, like green spaces or parks. For example, Participant VO-095 (a girl) drew a picture of an outdoor space and reported, "The sound of running water helped me to be calm during my difficult times". Likewise, Participant VO-090 (a girl) reported, "A park helps me to have peace of mind because it is so peaceful restful and fresh air" while Participant V077 (a girl) drew a picture of a park and reported, "I just went to the park to clear my mind off to get some peace." Finally, Participant VO-085 (a boy) drew a picture of a park with people engaging in various activities and explained how "... you don't have to have anyone in life to get to where you want" and that, to do well in life you should "Get help [and] improve your physical health", by running in a park for example (as illustrated in the drawing).

[Insert Figure 3 here]

Discussion

Our secondary analysis of 79 adolescent participants' drawings and written explanations explored what resources helped this sample of young people to show resilience despite the challenges of life and COVID-19 2020 lockdown conditions. The findings show that resources from different systems mattered for the resilience of this sample of adolescents living in Zamdela township during COVID-19 2020 lockdown conditions, including personal, relational, and environmental ones. This study thus highlights the

multisystemic nature of resilience enablers for this sample of young people. This notion of resilience resources being multisystemic is emphasised in the more recent resilience literature (Masten et al., 2021; Ungar & Theron, 2020), and challenges more historic understandings of resilience as being person-centred or mainly psychological.

Personal resources were the most reported enabler of adolescent resilience. While personal resources typically include psychological and physiological strengths, such as health status, agency, self-efficacy, and problem solving (Masten, 2021; Ungar & Theron, 2020), we found that personal resources typically referred to adolescents taking action (i.e., agency) and having a hopeful and positive stance about themselves and/or the future. The prominence of personal resources aligns well with international and local studies on adolescent resilience during COVID-19 (Beames et al., 2021; Gittings et al., 2021). It also aligns well with two reviews of African studies of youth resilience and their emphasis on personal resources (albeit in tandem with relational ones; Theron, 2020; Van Breda & Theron, 2018). Adolescents might single out their own resources when accounting for resilience because of their developmental preoccupation with the self (Van Breda & Theron, 2018), and/or because resource constrained communities may struggle to provide relational, institutional or ecological supports (Sanders et al., 2017; Singh & Naicker, 2019). In addition, it is possible that 2020 lockdown regulations, which frequently restricted access to resources in adolescents' social and physical environments, could account for the emphasis on personal resources. Thus, while our findings were not limited to personal strengths, their prominence in the dataset is a reminder that individual capacity for resilience takes centre stage when contextual and temporal dynamics, such as resource constraints and lockdown conditions, prevail.

The least reported enabler of adolescent resilience was physical ecological resources and this, too, aligns well with reports that the resilience literature seldom makes mention of resilience-enabling factors located in the built and natural environment (Ungar & Theron, 2020). Typically, resilience studies, including those conducted in African contexts, prioritise human resources (Ungar & Theron 2020; Van Breda & Theron, 2018). This neglect is perhaps more prominent in resource-constrained African contexts, like the Zamdela township that was the site of our study, where physical ecological resources are limited. Additionally, young people are unlikely to report physical ecological spaces or places as resilience-enabling if they do not feel safe in these contexts. There are many reports of public spaces in resource-constrained African contexts being sites characterised by litter, degradation, and adults who prey on young people (Adams et al., 2017; Nissen et al., 2020).

Although not the most reported on resilience resource, relational resources were still regularly included by this sample of young people and,

thus, fits well with African and international research on adolescent resilience and its emphasis on the value of relational supports to adolescent resilience (Laxton, 2021; Van Breda & Theron, 2018). It is possible that relational resources were less reported on in our research since the data was generated during COVID-19 lockdown conditions when gatherings and the movement of people were restricted. Additionally, during lockdown conditions, there was a reported increase in family violence (Gittings et al., 2021), as well as school closures that could have inhibited adolescent access to non-family relational resources (Fouché et al., 2020; Government of South Africa, 2021b). This difference is a reminder that the most reported/preferred enablers of resilience may differ based on the temporal context in which adolescents find themselves (Ungar, 2019).

Overall, then, our findings draw attention to how developmental (being an adolescent), contextual (resource constraints), and temporal (Covid-19-related lockdown) factors play into the multisystemic mix of factors that support adolescent resilience at a given point in time and which factors in that mix are most prominent. In the face of such dynamics, it is possible that young people experience that they themselves are the mainstay of their resilience even though the resilience field discourages person-focused accounts of resilience in favour of multisystemic ones (Masten et al., 2021; Ungar & Theron, 2020). Young people's experience should not be interpreted to mean that resilience is a solo endeavour. Instead, stakeholders need to acknowledge and celebrate young people's personal capacities, while simultaneously working hard to complement and sustain such personal capacity via access to formal and informal relational supports along with resources in the built and natural environment.

Limitations

As noted elsewhere, there is a need for longitudinal studies of resilience (Beames et al., 2021; Masten et al., 2021). The data drawn on in this paper was generated by a sample of Zamdela adolescents at a single point in time. The resulting cross-sectional insights are limited when the focus is something as dynamic as resilience (Fullerton et al., 2021). Additionally, conceptualisations of risk and resilience could vary depending on sex (DaViera et al., 2020; Scorgie et al., 2017). Although we contrasted the responses of young men and women where possible, we might have achieved greater insight into what enabled adolescent resilience had we asked young people to comment on how their biological sex and gender identity played into the resources they reported. Finally, a substantial number of adolescents in South Africa are not school-attending and this was made worse during COVID-19 (Hall, 2022). Since we only worked with school-attending

adolescents, our findings do not further the understanding of the resilience of non-school attending adolescents – especially in a pandemic context.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of our study show that resilience-enabling resources from different systems (i.e., personal, relational and physical ecological) mattered for the resilience of a sample of adolescents living in Zamdela township during COVID-19 2020 lockdown conditions. These findings have the potential to serve as a starting point to bolster resilience in light of potential future pandemics. In the interim, they have value for those working to support adolescent wellbeing in resource-constrained contexts. It is our hope that the findings will discourage an over-emphasis on individual strengths and instead encourage exploration of the multisystemic resilience factors that matter most for adolescent resilience in a given context at a given point in time, along with their application in intervention planning. Additionally, since systems are interlinked, using a multisystemic intervention has the potential to have a positive impact not just on individual adolescents but on their families and communities too (Porter & Nuntavisit, 2016; Splett et al., 2015). In so doing, the capacity of resource-constrained ecologies to champion adolescent resilience will be bolstered, leaving adolescents less dependent on personal sources of resilience.

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Figure 1

Participant V061's drawing of himself playing soccer as a way to distract himself from life's challenges

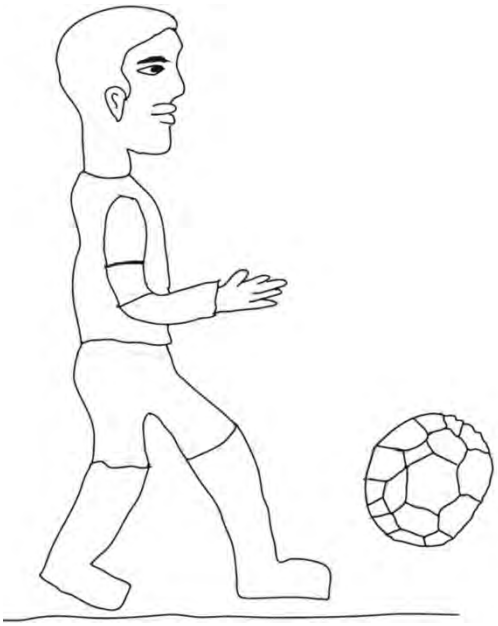

Figure 2

Participant V083's drawing of his environment and how his parents are always there to support him in life

Figure 3

Participant V217's drawing of the library that gives her a safe space to feel better about life