

**Trainee Psychologists' experiences of providing psychosocial
support to Educators during COVID-19 in South Africa**

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By

ALLISON SIMONSE

21S7010

Supervisor

PROFESSOR JACQUELINE AKHURST

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic adversely affected the school going population in South Africa and Educators in the country were faced with several mental health challenges as a result. These mental health concerns coupled with the reality of living within the confines of a pandemic resulted in the need for psychosocial support. This resulted in formulation of workshops based on the needs of Educators, to be delivered via online means by Rhodes University postgraduate students in 2020 studying towards their Masters in Counselling Psychology. This study makes use of a case study approach to explore and examine the experiences of three of these students, so as to ascertain the implications of working online with groups amidst pandemic conditions. It explores how professional practice and the deployment of Community Psychologies have taken place during this period. Experiences encompassing the personal and professional development that occurred as part of engaging with Community-Based Service Learning during COVID–19 have been collected through the Single Question Inducing Narrative methodology, so as to enable the postgraduate student voice in the context of pandemic conditions to be added to the available literature, in an effort to position the application of Community Psychology critically within the South African context. It is hoped that the data generated from this study might assist in future programme planning and intervention, so as to encourage training standards to remain responsive to the times, whilst seeking insight into how value-laden praxis can be achieved through work at the intersections between theory and practice.

Keywords: Community-Based Service Learning, Educators and COVID–19, Community and Counselling Psychology, online group facilitation, Single Question Inducing Narrative methodology.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iii
DECLARATION	vii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	viii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT	1
1.1 The COVID-19 Pandemic – International and African Perspectives	1
1.1.1 International Perspective	1
1.1.2 African and South African Perspective	2
1.2 The impact of COVID-19 on South African Learning Institutions	3
1.3 Student experiences of Community Based Service Learning amidst Pandemic conditions.....	5
1.3.1 Background of the study.....	6
1.4 Motivation for engaging with this study	7
1.5 Aim of the study.....	7
1.6 Definitions of key terms	7
1.6.1 Community Based Service Learning (CBSL)	7
1.6.2 Community Psychology - CP	8
1.6.3 Psychosocial Support	8
1.7 Overview of research structure	8
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	10
2.1 Community Psychology – An Overview	10
2.1.1 International perspective	10
2.1.2 A South African Perspective	12

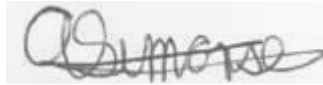
2.2	Community Based Service Learning (CBSL).....	13
2.3	CBSL in institutions of higher education in South Africa	14
2.4	Positioning Student Voices In CBSL Literature	15
2.5	Community Psychology Values And Its Synergies With CBSL	16
2.5.1	Social Justice	17
2.5.2	Respect for Human Diversity	17
2.5.3	Sense of Community	18
2.5.4	Collective Wellness	18
2.5.5	Empowerment and Citizen Participation	19
2.5.6	Collaboration	19
2.5.7	Empirical Grounding	20
2.5.8	Multilevel Strength-Based Perspectives	20
2.6	Narrative Psychology	21
2.7	Study rationale.....	22
2.8	Research questions	22
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY		24
3.1	Introduction	24
3.2	The narrative research paradigm	25
3.3	Research design.....	25
3.4	Sampling.....	26
3.5	Data collection.....	27
3.6	Organisation of data	28
3.7	Data analysis	29

3.8	Ethical considerations	30
3.9	Evaluating the research	31
3.10	Study limitations.....	33
3.11	Reflexivity	33
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS		35
Part A: Contextual information.....		35
4.1	Overall programme participants	35
4.2	Participants	35
Part B: Research questions.....		36
4.3	What were the experiences of Trainee Psychologists providing psychosocial support workshops to educators during the COVID- 19 pandemic?	36
4.3.1	Personal experiences of working within a CBSL programme amidst pandemic.....	36
4.3.2	Trainee narratives of providing psychosocial support to Educators amidst pandemic.....	39
4.4	What were Trainee Psychologists’ experiences of making use of online platforms to deliver psychosocial support to Educators.....	42
4.4.1	Using an online interface as a mechanism for psychosocial delivery.....	42
4.4.2	Online versus in person engagements	44
4.5	What are the implications of these experiences for the practice of Community Psychology in our local community setting (Makhanda)?	45
4.5.1	Online training is essential	45
4.5.2	CP and the need to evolve.....	46
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION.....		47
5.1	Adjusting and re-adjusting amidst pandemic	47

5.2	Troubling the concept of community	48
5.3	The student experience.....	49
5.4	Pivotal shift in professional training	49
5.5	The utility of online engagements.....	50
5.6	Implications for future CBSL activities in Makhandha	50
5.7	Process comments	51
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION		52
6.1	Summary of main findings.....	52
6.2	Limitations of the study.....	53
6.3	Recommendations	54
6.4	Final comments	54
REFERENCES		56
APPENDIX A.1: Initial Ethics approval Letter.....		64
APPENDIX A.2: Ethics Approval Renewal Letter		65
APPENDIX B.1: Gatekeeper Permission – The Director of Student Affairs.....		66
APPENDIX B.2 Gatekeeper Permission – The Registrar		67
APPENDIX C: Invitation to participate in the study.....		68
APPENDIX D: Consent form.....		70
APPENDIX E: Permission to use tape recordings		74

DECLARATION

I, Allison Simonse, declare that this research is a result of my own work, except where otherwise stated. I have given the full acknowledgement of the sources referred to in the text. This study has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any university.



Allison Simonse

(February, 2024)

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

1.1 THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC – INTERNATIONAL AND AFRICAN PERSPECTIVES

1.1.1 International Perspective

In a similar fashion to its predecessors, SARS-CoV (Severe Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus and MERS-CoV (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus), SARS- CoV-2, also known as COVID-19 is a severe respiratory tract infection that is said to have been first discovered in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China in late November 2019 (Harpan & Itoh, 2020). This particular strain of coronavirus is highly contagious and spread globally within a relatively short period of time and was officially declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organisation (WHO) on 11 March 2020 (Lone & Amad, 2020).

The virus has high mortality rates with over 142 299 deaths being reported in 214 countries within the first four months of 2020 (Hu & Guo, 2021). Countries such as The United States of America (USA), Italy, Spain, France, Germany and the United Kingdom were the most affected by the first wave of the virus, with over 40 000 confirmed cases registered in these nations within a one-month period (Hu & Guo, 2021).

The effects of COVID-19 in the Northern Hemisphere were well documented, especially the plight faced by Italians; as various media houses depicted the dire straits in which the ill and health care workers found themselves. The consequences of disease mitigation restrictions led to income being reduced, unemployment figures rising, disruptions in all services and curtailment of manufacturing, affecting the economy globally and leading to financial markets being affected (Pak, et al., 2020). All of these impacted significantly on people's lives and livelihoods.

1.1.2 African and South African Perspective

Africa was said to be the last continent to be affected by COVID-19 (Lone & Amad, 2020). The first case of the novel coronavirus was confirmed in Egypt on 14 February 2020, with Nigeria reporting its first case on 27 February 2020 (Lone & Amad, 2020).

It is pertinent to note that Africa was considered to be the most vulnerable continent in terms of COVID-19 infections, as the continent has a health care system that is weakened by a lack of resources in terms of hospital infrastructure, overcrowding, understaffing in medical institutions, economic corruption and a large immunocompromised patient population due to a high prevalence of Malaria, HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis (TB) and Malnutrition amongst Africans (Hu & Guo, 2021).

In February 2021, the African Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (2021) reported that, “There are currently 433 239 active cases of COVID-19 on the African continent with 102 843 COVID-19 related deaths recorded” (p. 1). Furthermore, they continued:

The provision of vaccines through the COVAX facility (the vaccine pillar for access to COVID-19 tools outlined by WHO) and the African Union to as many Africans as possible, together with the continuous observation of social distancing/hygiene protocols is the only way the effects of the pandemic can be mitigated (p. 3).

In South Africa, the first documented case of COVID-19 was confirmed on 5 March 2020. The patient, also known as “patient zero”, was a 38-year-old man who had travelled to Italy with his wife and returned to South Africa on 1 March 2020 (Broadbent & Combrink, 2020). The South African government took swift action by enacting a National State of Disaster on 15 March 2020.

The initial restrictions outlined by government were moderate with restrictions mainly geared towards tourism, international travel and the movement of people in public spaces such as bars and restaurants. However, due to a subsequent increase in COVID-19 cases in the country and worldwide during the month of March 2020, a 21-day so-called “hard lockdown”, which prohibited citizens from leaving their homes for non-essential purposes, was imposed by the President of South Africa on 27 March 2020 (Lone & Amad, 2020). Furthermore, South Africa adopted a “risk-adjusted strategy” which saw the country implement various levels of lockdown subsequently (with varying levels of movement and economic activity allowed for citizens) based on the trajectory with which the virus spread across the country.

1.2 THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON SOUTH AFRICAN LEARNING INSTITUTIONS

Learners, teachers, lecturers and students were not permitted to attend school or university under Lockdown Alert Levels 3- 5 and subsequently online/distance learning was encouraged by both the Department of Higher and Basic Education (Parker, et al., 2020). The closure of educational institutions, as a result of COVID-19 further highlighted the existing inequalities within South Africa’s education sector, as limited accessibility to technological infrastructure resulted in many learners and students being unable to engage in online learning (Le Grange, 2020).

Educators were not immune to the effects of COVID- 19, as many had not been trained to facilitate online learning (Parker et al., 2020). In the case of educators in rural communities, many struggled with access to stable internet connection, which in turn placed limitations on online engagement with students (Le Grange, 2020).

Further, it is important to note the legacy of the country’s segregated past and an education system that has been compromised by the unequal distribution of resources, corruption and a

lack of infrastructure. Schools in South Africa are not merely educational institutions but also allow learners from rural communities to have access to basic resources such as food, for example the implementation of the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP), which provides over 9 million children with two meals per day (Le Grange, 2020).

Due to movement restrictions, learners were not able to access the NSNP, which further exacerbated the negative effects of the pandemic on the country's school-attending population. In addition, due to elevated levels of poverty and unemployment due to the ceasing of economic activity during the more extreme phases of lockdown; many learners and students struggled to engage with online learning.

The South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) as outlined in Le Grange (2020) reported,

Our members are struggling as a result of this pandemic because not only are we aware of the fact that many of our learners are facing hunger as a result of lockdown but as teachers, we are worried about the ability of learners to engage online especially in rural communities. (p. 7)

This statement by South Africa's largest teachers' union indicates the plight faced by educators, since not only were teachers concerned for the well-being of their learners but also by the introduction of online learning, as educators themselves had to adapt to teaching virtually amidst a pandemic. The health and mental well-being of many Educators were also impacted when the staggered reopening of schools commenced in June 2020, as many had fallen ill or lost loved ones to the virus (Spaull, 2020).

1.3 STUDENT EXPERIENCES OF COMMUNITY BASED SERVICE LEARNING AMIDST PANDEMIC CONDITIONS

As a result of lockdown conditions in South Africa, most learning activities as highlighted above had to take place online. Universities had to adjust methods of instruction, so as to adhere to the regulations stipulated by the Department of Higher Education (Alex, 2022). The Masters in Counselling Psychology Degree at Rhodes University is a professional training programme that is accredited by the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) (Msomi, 2020). This programme includes year one (M1), which is a combination of theory and practical work undertaken as Trainee Counselling Psychologists; and year 2 (M2) is a 12-month practicum that takes place at an internship site, where Trainees are registered as Intern Counselling Psychologists (Akhurst & Msomi, 2022). It is clear that such programmes, where a substantial amount of practical work is done, would be particularly affected by moves to online learning.

The programme had to change its structure and procedures, so as to allow the 2020 cohort to meet training standards whilst still adhering to COVID-19 protocols (Msomi, 2020). An integral part of the cohorts' training consisted of Community Based Service Learning (CBSL), which aims to integrate experiential learning and academic goals with activities that have been designed to meet the objectives of communities for whom interventions have been geared (Hammersley, 2012).

CBSL has potential to enhance (1) academic learning, (2) foster civic responsibility, (3) develop life skills and (4) transform student attitudes related to the populations they are to engage once they enter the world of work (Hammersley, 2012).

1.3.1 Background of the study

In order to promote the aforementioned facets as outlined by Hammersley (2012), M1 Trainee Psychologists studying a Masters in Counselling Psychology at Rhodes University, as part of their curriculum, engaged with Community Psychology as a module (Msomi, 2020). This module is divided into two sections. First, the theoretical underpinnings of Community Psychology and its related facets are explored in weekly lectures and secondly, CBSL activities were planned and implemented by the cohort, so as to apply their knowledge to real word contexts (Msomi, 2020). It is acknowledged that Trainees (up until this point in their training) may have had varied exposure to Community Psychology and as a result this compulsory module is aimed to equip Trainees with skills to broaden their practice by enabling them to work with community and group settings (Akhurst & Msomi, 2022).

Traditionally, CBSL activities took place on a face to face basis with learners from schools within Makhanda (Msomi, 2020). However, in 2020 as a result of a call from the Rhodes University's Engagement Office regarding the impact of COVID- 19 on the local schooling community (in particular the adverse effects of the pandemic on Primary school Educators); the Trainee Counselling Psychology cohort's CBSL activities involved providing online psychosocial support workshops to Educators in Makhanda (Msomi, 2020). The workshops were presented by the Trainees on a rotational basis, where each intern had to have a chance to be the main topic presenter, the chat room manager and the person in charge of RSVPS. Each workshop had these three positions filled, so a minimum of three Trainees were involved for each topic. Topics that were covered included: illness related anxiety, bereavement and depression.

1.4 MOTIVATION FOR ENGAGING WITH THIS STUDY

As a Trainee in 2021, I engaged in the Community Psychology module and subsequently took part in CBSL activities that involved Educators. During this time, I became acutely aware of the challenges that staff members face within our schooling communities, as well as the importance of value-laden praxis and the student voice in relation to CBSL through my exposure to authors such as Akhurst et al. (2016), Akhurst (2017) and Carolissen et al. (2010). I believe that this research has an important role to play in contributing to the growing body of work surrounding Community Psychology within the South African context. It aims to provide an exploration of Trainee Counselling Psychologists' experiences of CBSL during pandemic conditions, in order to inform future psychosocial interventions that are relevant to the needs of communities that Counselling Psychologists serve.

1.5 AIM OF THE STUDY

This study aims to explore the experiences of Trainee Counselling Psychologists who provided psychosocial support to Educators amidst pandemic conditions, so as to add the postgraduate student voice to the growing body of available COVID-19 related literature. Further, this research sought to add student reflections on CBSL amidst pandemic to the existing literature, with regards to service learning as part of a postgraduate qualification.

1.6 DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

1.6.1 Community Based Service Learning (CBSL)

Community Based Service Learning can be defined as,

A form of experiential education that integrates meaningful community service into professional training programmes. CBSL contains two main elements: engagement within the community (service) and reflection on that engagement (learning). These elements call for students to partake in planned activities with the goal of meeting the

identified community needs, whilst also reflecting on the activity in such a way as to garner a deeper understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995, p. 112).

1.6.2 Community Psychology - CP

Community Psychology can be defined as, “psychological knowledge that is relevant to community life and responsive to structural, psychosocial and wellness issues affecting communities” (Angelique & Culley, 2007, p. 38).

1.6.3 Psychosocial Support

Psychosocial support refers to the

dynamic relationship between the psychological and social dimensions of a person; where these dimensions influence each other. The psychological dimension includes emotional and thought processes, feelings and reactions. The social dimension includes relationships, family, community networks, social values and cultural practices. Psychosocial support encompasses actions that meet the psychological and social needs of groups, families and, communities (Jose et al., 2022, p. 258).

1.7 OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH STRUCTURE

Including the introductory chapter, this research study is divided into six chapters. Chapter 2 consists of a review of selected literature related to the research topic: with a particular focus on Community Psychology; Community Based Service Learning; the values underpinning Community Psychology; the synergies between CP and CBSL based on these values; and the

deployment of Narrative Psychology (as the basis for conceptualizing the experiences of Trainees providing Psychosocial support amidst pandemic conditions). The rationale for this study as well as the research questions are presented at the end of this chapter. Chapter 3 discusses the methodological basis of the research process. This chapter includes the chosen research design, sampling technique, data collection methods, data organization techniques, and data analysis. Ethical considerations and limitations of the study are also presented. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the research study, derived from the Single Question Inducing Narrative technique (Wengraf, 2001) in response to the research questions. Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the research findings gathered, in relation to existing literature. Chapter 6 provides concluding reflections and a summary of the main findings in relation to the research questions. Recommendations as well as possible options for future research are also discussed within this chapter.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The following chapter will focus on selected literature that is related to the research topic. Firstly, an overview of Community Psychology (CP) as a sub discipline will be provided, so as to note the international and South African applications of CP within Psychology as a discipline. Secondly, Community Based Service Learning (CBSL) in institutions of Higher learning will be unpacked; in order to explore how these activities emerged in our nation's curriculum, as well as to position the student voice in the existing CBSL literature. Thirdly, the synergies that exist between CP and CBSL values, which have underpinned the study, will be explored. It is argued that the intersection between these two bodies of literature and their shared approaches contributed to on-going CBSL activities, despite experiences of pandemic conditions. Lastly, the Narrative psychological lens will be described, and its utility discussed in order to make sense of the experiences reported by participants in the study. The rationale behind conducting this study as well as the research questions related to the project may be found at the end of this chapter.

2.1 COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY – AN OVERVIEW

2.1.1 International perspective

The formulation of Community Psychology (CP) as a sub-discipline within the field of Psychology was formalised at a conference held in 1965 in Swampscott, the USA (Kagan et al., 2019). The Swampscott conference was called to consider the educating of psychologists to undertake interventions that served communities and groups (Fryer & Laing, 2008). This conference resulted in a call from those attending to move away from working solely with individuals to engaging in a Psychology that was also focussed on prevention, the

implementation of community based mental health practices and social action (Kagan et al., 2019).

The growing Civil Rights Movement in the United States at the time as well as then presiding Presidents Kennedy and Johnson's mandate to launch a "war against poverty" propelled practitioners to envision a wider scope, wherein psychological distress could be mitigated with interventions aimed at group and communal settings (Kagan et al., 2019). While the Swapscott conference might generally be viewed as the point of conception of CP in the USA, leading to the resultant codification of CP as a sub-discipline within the field of Psychology generally - it is of importance to note that countries located outside of this particular milieu reflect different contextual pathways with regards to the development of Community Psychologies (Fisher et al., 2008). This reflects that CP has evolved globally in a context-specific and varied manner. Further, it is noted that in order for interventions to be effective, CP needs to be responsive to the specific and varied needs of the people it is to serve.

The deployment of Community Psychologies in Latin America places much greater emphasis on the need for activism and social action or lobbying to occur, as part of Community Psychology structures (Visser & Moleko, 2012). This is evidenced in the emergence of Brazilian Community Psychology in the 1950s, as psychologists displayed a vested interest in engaging in activities to alleviate poverty and advocate for the rights of citizens in the midst of an oppressive government regime (Kirk, 2009).

The theoretical underpinnings of Community Psychologies in Australia and New Zealand centre around ideas of social responsibility, social justice and ethnic issues (Fisher et al., 2008). There are strong themes in both contexts that relate to combating past oppressive practices in relation to indigenous populations such as the Aboriginal Australians and the Māori people of New

Zealand. However, these goals are not always fulfilled. Although value-laden praxis is evident within professional practice in these respective countries, as evidenced by the inclusion of postgraduate CP programmes at universities in both countries, changes at a legislative and government level continue to be tedious and form barriers to implementation (Fisher et al., 2019).

Since its conception, the development of CP and as a result its definitions across academia have thus largely been dependent on place, time and context; which has resulted in some Community Psychology perspectives (such as those from the USA) becoming more dominant than others (Fryer & Laing, 2008). These authors note that the Americanisation of CP has led to the infiltration of Eurocentric ideologies into Community Psychologies throughout the world, through a process of cultural colonialism.

This process can be seen in the ways that the term “community” itself is deployed in different contexts, as the Americanization of community places great emphasis on geographical setting or location; whereas in South Africa, geographical location forms a smaller aspect of the lenses that practitioners need to don, in order to conceptualize groups and their specific needs (Naidoo, et al., 2016). With this in mind, Community Psychology in South Africa will be explored in the next section.

2.1.2 A South African Perspective

In South Africa, CP emerged during the 1980's, whilst the country was still governed by the then National Party and consequently citizens lived under the rule of the apartheid regime (Carolissen et al., 2010). It is noted that Community Psychology during this period of political and social turmoil was geared towards espousing a socially relevant Psychology and speaking out against oppression (Naidoo et al., 2016).

CP as a subdiscipline consists of a body of knowledge that focuses on domains beyond the individual, such as groups, organizations, and communities (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). As an approach to Psychology, value systems orientated towards empowerment and collaboration in unison with a systems approach to situations, categorises CP as antioppressive (Carolissen et al., 2010). Therefore social justice and a focus on the needs of the marginalized emerged as integral facets in leading towards the meaningful implementation of CP within the South African context.

Factors impacting CP interventions in South Africa include socio-economic status, access to knowledge about psychological services and the impacts of disadvantageous circumstances with regards to resource distribution, as a result of Apartheid spatial planning (Carolissen & Swartz, 2009). Further, the dubious use of Psychometric testing as a proponent of Apartheid's mandate to deny marginalized groups the same level of access to educative and developmental structures as that of the White minority is pertinent to note before embarking on engaging with community-based activities.

Additionally, the bias related to "community" as a concept referring solely to Black South Africans (as deployed during the Apartheid regime as a euphemism) needs to be re-conceptualised before any form of intervention that is to be meaningful can be implemented (Carolissen, 2006). The existence of a CP continuum is therefore evidenced by the aforementioned aspects and varied meanings of "community". These aspects and meanings subsequently affect the ability of value-laden praxis to be implemented where it is most needed.

2.2 COMMUNITY BASED SERVICE LEARNING (CBSL)

In North America, the term, "service learning" was first deployed in the USA in 1967 in reference to an internship programme funded by the Southern Regional Education Board,

whereby students received academic credit or financial remuneration from the government at the time to work on community projects (Kenny & Gallagher, 2002). Service learning continued to be done within small groups within the USA until the mid-1980s (Kenny & Gallagher, 2002). Thereafter, service learning and community-based learning slowly gained traction in institutions of Higher Learning in the USA and subsequently Canada; where it was viewed as different from community service or volunteerism in that it created an interwoven tapestry between academia and providing services to groups outside of the university walls (Taylor, 2014).

The literature surrounding community-based service learning, termed, “service learning” or “community service learning” in North America has evidenced its ability to enhance the learning experiences of students; whilst also sensitising them to the impact of social inequality within and between groups (Akhurst, 2017). Therefore, CBSL activities can be viewed as a link between what is taught in lectures and engaging in applications of knowledge in the lived realities of communities (Crump, 2002).

2.3 CBSL IN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

In South Africa, the embedding of CBSL in a number of institutions of Higher Education (HE) was driven by the Community-Higher Education Partnership (CHESP) from 1999 to 2002 (Akhurst et al., 2016). This was in response to the Department of Education’s directive of 1997, recommending community engagement in the Higher Education sector. This was done as a means to develop social accountability amongst students and to counteract the exclusionary academic policies of the country’s Apartheid past (Akhurst, 2017). It is pertinent to note that in order to declonise the way in which Psychological knowledge is dispensed to and practised by students, CBSL activities should be transformatitive in nature in order to be effective within the South African context (Akhurst & Msomi, 2022).

Therefore, the implementation of CBSL in South African universities is crucial, as the needs of communities are often complex and thus require a multidimensional approach in order to address the overall well-being of the nation's citizens (Preece, 2013).

Additionally, a multidimensional approach to the varied needs of community groups and partners allows those training at a postgraduate level in Psychology to illustrate how they engage and navigate the intersections of theory and practice (Akhurst, 2021). In the current study, this interface was challenging amidst pandemic conditions and showcased the importance of being able to practice CBSL in such a way that it remains responsive to the times.

2.4 POSITIONING STUDENT VOICES IN CBSL LITERATURE

Student voices commenting on their experiences of CBSL have reflected the importance of appreciating the assets and resilience of community partners, so as to shift away from the orthodox unilateral Psychology problem-focused lens towards a more appreciative focus of the attributes that enable community members to cope with the challenges they face (Akhurst, 2017). Moving away from this unilateral focus has also enabled students to adapt and apply theoretical knowledge to the diverse contexts that exist within South African communities (Preece, 2013). Akhurst (2017) reports that through the process of engaging in CBSL activities the general consensus amongst students was one of “deep reflection and the need to make psychology accessible” (p.6). Further, Akhurst et al. (2016) report that during reflective exercises after CBSL activities have taken place that students, “share their experiences not only as a means of reflection, but also as a team building/brain storming exercise - whereby social cohesion within the group increases and subsequently practical ideas regarding community interventions are formulated” (p. 8).

Although there have been some developments in the available literature surrounding CBSL and the student voice in South African universities by authors such as Preece, (2013), Akhurst et al., (2016) and Akhurst (2017), very limited research exists on the experiences of postgraduates; and particularly M1 Trainees providing psychosocial support amidst a pandemic.

2.5 COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY VALUES AND ITS SYNERGIES WITH CBSL

Despite the various ways in which CP has been deployed in different countries, it is pertinent to note that there are overarching values upon which the discipline has been based (Maseko, et al., 2017). Values can be viewed as ideals about what is considered morally correct or good, whilst also having the power to influence how goals are envisioned and undertaken (Kloos, et al., 2020). Therefore, values of Community Psychology can be viewed as the foundational or core elements that underpin how practice is to be executed so as to ensure that interventions address group needs, whilst espousing socially conscious behaviour (Maseko, et al., 2017).

It is noteworthy in the African and specifically South African context that values related to CP are not new discoveries, as they embody African culture through a communal understanding of human beings and their emergent traditions and worldviews (Visser et al., 2022). The following eight values of CP are outlined by Kloos et al. (2020) namely: social justice, respect for human diversity, sense of community, collective wellness, empowerment and citizen participation, collaboration, empirical grounding and, multilevel strength-based perspectives. These will be referred to in an effort to ground the study within in the CP discourse and subsequently make a case for the intersections that exist between CP and CBSL. Additionally, African and South African literature related to these values will be added to the discussion, so as to further strengthen a case for the synergies between CP and CBSL within our context.

2.5.1 Social Justice

This refers to the just and equitable distribution of resources, opportunities, and power across communities within a society (Kloos et al., 2020). Further, it is noted that advocacy for equality and having directives in place that ensure the well-being of all people, especially marginalized groups is a core element of practising social justice (Maseko et al., 2017). In the current study, by providing the Trainees with an opportunity to extend psychosocial support to an overlooked group within our society (Educators), the team endeavoured to implement value-laden praxis in such a way that CBSL activities served Educators and their specific needs, which prior to COVID-19 was not necessarily the case (CBSL-related support was mainly geared towards learners). Additionally, the Trainees remained mindful of the differences that existed amongst themselves as a cohort as well as the differences that existed in the group dynamics of their participants. This resulted in ground rules for engagement as well as expectations to be set up in unison with participants at beginning of their first workshop. This was done in order to ensure equality, as it allowed for all voices to be able to contribute to how the workshops would function.

2.5.2 Respect for Human Diversity

This value acknowledges the variety that exists in communities and social identities (Kloos et al., 2020). Factors such as gender, ethnic or racial identity, socioeconomic status, age, religious or spiritual beliefs and level of education need to be considered when conducting Community-based interventions (Kloos et al., 2020). Diversity emphasises the place of varying perspectives and as a result the diversity of a community is viewed as a strength rather than a weakness - multiple perspectives on a situation or issue can assist in providing comprehensive oversight and a holistic viewpoint, in place of an individualistic stance that may not be applicable to a group in its entirety (Maseko et al., 2017).

In light of this value, Trainees had to be cognizant of the diversity that existed amongst Educators, in order to tailor interventions that took into account the varied needs of school staff working in Makhanda. Not all Educators faced the exact same challenges due to the long-standing disparities that exist within the South African School System (Spaull, 2020).

2.5.3 Sense of Community

This can be described as a feeling of belonging, interdependence, and mutual commitment to goals set out by a collective (Kloos et al., 2020). The wellbeing of all people is promoted by creating shared emotional connections in group settings (Visser et al., 2022). A sense of community was fostered amongst the Trainee cohort, as their interventions as part of the CBSL project allowed them not only to provide psychosocial support that was geared towards the specific needs of Educators amidst pandemic conditions, but also allowed them to support one another, since each workshop had three Trainees playing various roles in its facilitation. This was to promote a sense of connectedness amongst participants, as their needs were addressed; as well as creating a supportive environment for team work and collaboration to take place amongst the Trainees.

2.5.4 Collective Wellness

This encompasses a feeling of contentment within a community that balances the objective and subjective needs of all groups within that community (Kloos et al., 2020). The Trainees embodied collective wellness by taking into account the needs of Educators at various points of the pandemic. This was done by having a flexible workshop structure that was adjusted in accordance to the concerns voiced by Educators on a weekly basis. This speaks to the

importance of practising CP and CBSL activities in such a way that they remain relevant in times of varying psychological distress, such as under pandemic conditions.

2.5.5 Empowerment and Citizen Participation

These elements are cornerstones in all work that falls within the CP spectrum, as these facets ensure that community input at all levels of intervention planning and implementation are present (Kloos et al., 2020). The aim of empowerment particularly is to instil a belief in group members that they have the capacity to solve their own problems and that through their participation they can mobilise themselves towards discussions regarding inventions that may assist their community (Visser et al., 2022). The Trainee cohort used these components as a point of reference when working with Educators, as they provided a platform during their workshops for their participants to engage with the subject matter presented through the use of small group discussions in breakaway rooms on the platform, Zoom. This in turn encouraged Educators to share with their peers and further empowered members who might have experienced difficulty with expressing their views in the larger main group.

2.5.6 Collaboration

This value entails an equal distribution of power in the relationships that exist between community psychologists and community members (Kloos et al., 2020). The CBSL activities undertaken by the 2020 Trainee Psychologist cohort allowed for Educators to contribute their own knowledge and strengths, which was in turn used to inform interventions. It is important to note that Trainees had to use their postgraduate training in CP in order to perform CBSL activities, whilst being mindful of not assuming an overt expert role. If they had assumed the role of the “all knowing”, this could have led to feelings of hierarchical superiority among

group members and consequently would have influenced the contributions made by workshop participants, as attendees may have felt that their viewpoints were invalid.

2.5.7 Empirical Grounding

This value notes the importance of empirical research to make community interventions more effective, by using the findings from the literature to provide better insight into communities and their existing frameworks (Kloos et al., 2020). Further, programme evaluation is critical to promote the improvement of a programme, whilst holding the programme itself accountable to its stakeholders (Visser et al., 2022.) Trainees made use of the CP applications and values that they were exposed to during the theoretical training aspect of the 2020 Community Psychology module, to inform their virtual interventions. This pioneering stance in turn motivated the exploration of their experiences in this study, so as to locate the practice and execution of CP and CBSL activities amidst the pandemic and to add them to the existing literature. Additionally, programme evaluation was conducted by the means of a reflective essay on the activities that took place (Msomi, 2020). Essay feedback as well as responses garnered from the Trainees regarding their work with Educators was integrated into the annual Rhodes Psychology Clinic Report, which was then shared with the relevant stakeholders (Msomi, 2020).

2.5.8 Multilevel Strength-Based Perspectives

These perspectives aim to move away from a unilateral focus on individual needs and rather move towards recognizing and integrating community strengths into the practice of Community Psychology (Kloos et al., 2020). The CBSL activities that were undertaken by the 2020 Trainee Psychologist cohort espoused intervention in a multi-faceted fashion, as the knowledge and existing skill set of Educators was utilized in order to conceptualize the psychological distress these participants experienced amidst lockdown conditions.

As evidenced by the above, CBSL and CP both have similar core objectives, as CBSL forms part of the CP “toolkit” in terms of its ability to meet the psychosocial needs of communities and broader society (Kloos et al., 2020).

The need for community engagement, especially during a pandemic is pertinent not only to meet the mental health needs of groups, which in this study included Educators and subsequently their students; but also to facilitate the development of e-counselling skills, which refers to mental health services that are provided to clients by registered health care professionals via e-email, video conferencing, virtual reality technology, chat technology or any combination of these (Sucala, et al., 2012). By equipping trainee psychologists with e-counselling skills, an additional skill was added to their professional competencies, which in turn allowed for psychosocial support to be provided to educators; whilst still adhering to COVID-19 health and safety protocols.

2.6 NARRATIVE PSYCHOLOGY

A narrative can be defined, “as an organized interpretation of a sequence of events which involves attributing agency to the characters in the narrative and inferring causal links between the events” (Murray, 2018, p. 113). The main function of narrative is that it brings order to disorder through a process of storytelling. The narrator is in charge of organizing that which unclear, so that it becomes clear to the listener (Murray, 2003).

Narrative psychology as a discipline is involved with the stories told in social interactions; and how these stories are structured, the contents, and the function of the stories (Murray, 2003). Willig (2013) describes narratives as stories or accounts people tell about their experiences derived from their social worlds. In order to construct a narrative, multiple and interconnected stories are told.

There is a dual layer of narrative analysis that needs to take place in order to make sense of the experiences of others. This involves research participants interpreting their own lives through narrative and then researcher interpreting the construction of that narrative into understandable stories or themes (Murray, 2018). It is of importance to note that narratives may not only be about the events that have happened, but also focus on the effects of these events.

The deployment of the narrative psychological lens, which took into account the social and psychological realities and histories of the Trainees have the potential to inform professional practice and training, as practitioners navigate the provision of psychosocial services post pandemic.

2.7 STUDY RATIONALE

Although there is available literature regarding CBSL taking place in South African Universities, there is limited qualitative research exploring this phenomenon amongst postgraduate students, specifically amidst pandemic conditions. By engaging with the experiences of Trainee Counselling Psychologists who participated in CBSL activities in 2020 and adding the student voice to the existing COVID-19 literature; insights can be garnered in order to assist with ensuring CP and CBSL remain responsive to needs of communities during and post pandemic. The research questions derived from these ideas follow.

2.8 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What were the experiences of Trainee Psychologists providing psychosocial support workshops to Educators during the COVID- 19 pandemic?

- What were Trainee Psychologists' experiences of making use of online platforms to provide psychosocial support to Educators during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- What are the implications of these experiences for the practice of Community Psychology in our local community setting (Makhanda)?

The following chapter will explore the research methodology and resulting research design that were employed, in order to provide evidence in response to the above questions.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Research methodology can be viewed as a way to systematically solve research problems and can be understood as the science of studying how research protocols are implemented (Patel & Patel, 2019). This project made use of qualitative inquiry, which supports the discovery of new perspectives on phenomena when existing theory describing these phenomena is either inadequate or absent (Butler et al., 2021). The focus of this study was to explore the experiences of Trainee Counselling Psychologist providing psychosocial support to Educators during COVID-19, in order to gain an understanding of how this work took place, how they experienced conducting workshops online and to add the postgraduate student voice to the literature pertaining to CBSL activities and COVID-19.

Further, the study aimed to consider how CBSL and CP could remain responsive to needs of a community in pandemic conditions. In light of this aim, the study was situated within a social constructivist framework, which emphasizes the importance of culture, context and time in understanding what occurs in society and making use of this understanding to construct knowledge (Beaumie, 2010). Willig (2013) notes that social constructivism examines the conditions that allow for constructions of reality to take place and for the subsequent consequences of these constructions to be unpacked, in relation to human experience and social practice. The application of this framework in relation to the experiences of Trainee Counselling Psychologists engaging in CBSL activities with Educators amidst pandemic conditions enables constructs related to professional practice during times of pandemic, CBSL and CP to be elaborated upon.

3.2 THE NARRATIVE RESEARCH PARADIGM

This study has made use of a narrative approach, which is a form of qualitative research design in which stories regarding events and individual experiences are told for the purpose of understanding, covering and creating meaning from experienced phenomena (Stuhlmiller, 2001). The narrative approach involves inquiry directed at human experience and the nature thereof (Willig, 2013). Thus, this implementation of a narrative paradigm was suitable to use when exploring and reflecting upon the experiences of Trainee Psychologists engaging with CBSL amidst pandemic conditions. In order to garner narratives relating to the experiences of Trainee Psychologists engaging in CBSL activities in during COVID-19, the nature of the study undertook an exploratory format.

An exploratory research approach allows for the investigation of problems that are not yet clearly defined or understood (Stebbins, 2011). Due to pandemic conditions and constant changes to the ways in which people were allowed to interact, limited literature was available to the Trainees with regards to how specifically to conduct psychosocial support activities virtually in 2020. Thus, by making use of an exploratory approach informed by the narrations of members of the 2020 Trainee cohort, stories regarding the implementation of CBSL activities amidst pandemic (which has not yet been explicitly covered in the literature) have been captured for the purpose of understanding, meaning making and practice development.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

Case studies are a qualitative design, whereby the researcher explores in depth a programme, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals (Creswell, 2009). The case(s) are bound by time and activity and as a researcher one is tasked with collecting detailed information from the case(s) being examined. The case being investigated in this study is the experiences of 2020

Rhodes University Trainee Counselling Psychologists providing psychosocial support to Educators amidst pandemic, as part of the CBSL activities of their M1 training programme. The case study approach is particularly useful to undertake when there is a need to obtain an in-depth appreciation or understanding of an issue, event or phenomenon within its real- life context (Crowe, et al., 2011).

This design allowed for the experiences of the cohort to be explored in such a way that the postgraduate student voice could be positioned in literature related to CBSL, CP and COVID-19. Further, the design enabled the lived experiences of the participants to be unpacked, which in turn provided insight into how deployment of CBSL and its activities has to remain responsive in light of the phenomenon that was the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.4 SAMPLING

Purposive sampling in qualitative research is used for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas, et al., 2015). This implies that participants who are related to the phenomenon being investigated need to be deliberately selected by the researcher. The sampling procedure for this study was therefore purposive in nature, as the researcher selected a sample that aligns with the purpose of the research - that is the 2020 first year Rhodes Trainee Counselling Psychology cohort, which comprised six Trainees. The sample itself consisted of three participants, as this allowed for sufficient data saturation. The Director of Student of Affairs at Rhodes University and the university's Registrar granted the researcher permission to conduct interviews with the Trainee cohort (see Appendix B). Thereafter, the participants were contacted via email and invited to participant in the study (see Appendix C).

3.5 DATA COLLECTION

Data collection is a process whereby data is collected from relevant sources, with the end goal of using the collected data in such a way that it answers research questions (Kabir, 2016). The study made use of interviews in order to gather the lived experiences of participants. The interviews took place online using the electronic platform, Zoom. The interviews were recorded and stored on a secure device that only the researcher and their supervisor had access to. This was done so that verbatim transcriptions of the narratives shared could be undertaken. Data collection commenced in May 2022 and the process was completed in July of the same year.

The interviews were conducted according to the Biographic-Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) (Wengraf, 2001). The interviews made use of the Single Question Inducing narrative (SQIN) as outlined by Wengraf (2001). This was done in order to guide the interview process. This method facilitates understanding of both the inner and outer worlds of historically-evolving persons in historically evolving situations. Therefore, this method is applicable for use in this study, as it would have allowed for the experiences of Trainee Psychologists' providing CBSL amidst pandemic conditions to be explored.

The BNIM has three sub-sessions as outlined by Wengraf (2001), which were followed by the researcher: During the first sub session, one question forms the basis of the SQIN. This was "Please describe your experiences of providing psychosocial to Educators amidst pandemic in Makhanda? You may include as many stories, accounts or comments as you would like". The wording was planned with the aim of producing a narrative from the participant. It is important to note that as part of the BNIM and SQIN, the researcher is only allowed to encourage the participant through the use of reassurances, such as, "please continue or tell me more" and

nonverbal prompts such as head nods (Wengraf, 2001). This was done in an effort to allow participants to share their authentic experiences in a way that minimized the risk of bias.

The researcher proceeded to make shorthand notes of topics that arose during the interview. These initial interviews on average took 26 minutes to complete for each participant.

The second sub-session occurred on the same day, after a fifteen-minute break. During the break, the researcher prepared questions based on the topics that had arisen from the initial phase. The researcher further worked to solicit responses from the interviewee by asking for clarification where needed during this subsection. These interviews took on average 35 to 40 minutes to complete for each participant.

The third sub-session occurred two weeks after the initial interview with each participant. The two-week period between interviews allowed for a preliminary analysis of the data from the first two sessions to be undertaken, which included listening to the recordings and transcription processes. This allowed for questions to be prepared that aimed at eliciting more narrative from the participants, so as to further explore their experiences of CBSL amidst pandemic. These interviews took on average 50 to 60 minutes to complete.

3.6 ORGANISATION OF DATA

The data collected from the interviews was transcribed verbatim. Verbatim transcripts capture the exact spoken word including stutters and pauses (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006). This is helpful as stutters, pauses and filler words such as “um”, allow the researcher to garner insight into the behaviour and actions of participants whilst engaging in the interview process (Wengraf, 2001). In order to ensure the accuracy of the transcriptions, the researcher listened to the recordings several times as well as reviewing the shorthand field notes that had been made during the interviews - this allowed the researcher to garner a deeper understanding of

the experiences of the participants and subsequently assisted with data analysis procedures. Further, the transcriptions, recordings and field notes were reviewed by the study's supervisor, as a secondary means of content analysis, so as to ensure the narratives of participants were adequately organized. The names of the participants were anonymized in order maintain the confidentiality of their respective identities.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

The data gathered from the interview process was analysed using template analysis as outlined by Brookes et al. (2015). Template analysis involves the development of a hierarchical coding template, which aims to summarise themes identified by the researcher as important in sets of data (King, 2023). A hierarchical template is deployed by first searching for broad themes such as responses to "CBSL activities amidst pandemic", and then including successively narrower and more specified themes, such as changed dynamics in professional psychology training. This enabled the researcher to organise themes in a manner which was useful for the purpose of meaning making, which in turn assisted in addressing research questions.

The procedure for data analysis as outlined by Brookes et al. (2015) took place as follows: The researcher first had to become familiar with the accounts provided by participants. This was achieved by reviewing the field notes, re-listening to the audio recordings and ensuring that the transcriptions accurately captured the narratives of the interviewees. The researcher read through these data several times, actively listening so as to be able to make note of patterns and meanings that arose.

Secondly, the researcher carried out the preliminary coding of the data. A code can be viewed as the most basic element of a raw data set that can be assessed with regards to a phenomenon in order to for meaning making to occur (Boyatzis, 1998).

The researcher undertook this process by highlighting facets of the transcriptions that contributed towards their understanding of the experiences of Trainee Counselling Psychologists. It is pertinent to note that coding can be subjective and that from one researcher to the next, their ideas about what may be important in a data set may differ. The researcher created a preliminary list of codes from the facets they highlighted from the transcribed sub-sessions of the BNIM undertaken by the three participants.

Thirdly, the researcher organized the emerging themes into meaningful clusters and started to define how they related to each other within and between these groupings. Themes are patterns in a data set that in some way meaningfully link to research questions (Butina, 2015).

The next step the researcher undertook was to create the initial template, which included establishing hierarchal relationships; where narrower themes were included so as to unpack the experiences of Trainees. Further, the study's supervisor independently created a list of potential themes and notes were then compared between the supervisor and researcher. Thereafter, the initial template was then applied to the whole data set. The researcher re-read the transcriptions, in order to note if there was any material that was of potential relevance to the study that did not fit in with the existing themes identified in the initial coding template. The template was then modified in order to ensure that the all presented themes were relevant to the study. The modified template was then used to interpret the findings. Lastly, the report was produced with the goal of providing a narrative that is clear, concise and logical, in order to formulate rich textual descriptions that aimed to answer the research questions meaningfully.

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations are a set of principles that guide research design and ensure the well – being and dignity of participants (Mohd - Arifin, 2018). Key principles include voluntary

participation, informed consent, confidentiality, potential for harm and the communication of results (Mohd - Arifin, 2018). The project was granted ethical approval by the Rhodes University Human Ethics Committee (RU – HEC) and was subsequently renewed and approved as per committee requirements (see Appendix A).

In order to uphold the above principles, the participants were allowed to choose if they wanted to engage in the study and further they were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Consent forms (see Appendix D), which provided information regarding the study and outlined how risks (if any) would be mitigated were provided to the potential participants; as well as the permission to use tape recordings document (see Appendix E). This was all done before data collection commenced.

The researcher anonymized the identities of the participants, in order to protect their confidentiality and ensure their right to anonymity. Further, the context of the research was described to the participants and they were informed that they had the right to ask for clarification if they were uncertain about any facet of the study.

3.9 EVALUATING THE RESEARCH

When examining the quality of qualitative research, trustworthiness and rigour are essential factors (Stahl & King, 2020). Lincoln and Guba (1985) outlined four criteria to use when evaluating the trustworthiness and rigor of qualitative research projects, namely: credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. These criteria aim to assist readers in interpreting the written work in such a way to provide confidence in what the researcher has reported (Stahl & King, 2020).

Credibility refers to how congruent the research findings are with reality (Stahl & King, 2020). The search for credibility entails examining if the study measures what it has intended to measure, in other words internal validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The researcher aimed to ensure credibility by having frequent meetings with the study's supervisor in order to discuss ideas, approaches and methods related to the project. Feedback sessions and scrutiny were pertinent in ensuring that data analysis procedures, as well as the reporting of the findings were an accurate representation of the narratives provided by participants. Additionally, new ideas that arose from supervision meetings were implemented and the researcher endeavoured to provide context to the reader, so as to allow for immersion in the experiences of the Trainee cohort with regards to the provision of CBSL activities amidst pandemic conditions.

Transferability can be viewed as the extent to which research findings are applicable for use in other studies - that is external validity (Stahl & King, 2020). It is important to note that qualitative research does not aim for replicability, however patterns and descriptions from one context may be applicable to another if conditions are similar (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher endeavoured to provide sufficient contextual information, so that if other researcher chose to use the findings of this study, they would be able to assess whether said findings were transferable to their specific context. The dependability criterion aims to examine the reliability of the research conducted (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher aimed to ensure reliability through the practice of a dependability audit, which entailed examining the process of inquiry such as: how the data was collected, how it was organized and the subsequent accuracy thereof in conjunction with supervisory input (Stahl & King, 2020). This was done in hopes of ensuring more dependable research findings.

Confirmability is concerned with getting as close to an objective reality as possible within a qualitative research framework (Stahl & King, 2020). It is important to note that the positionality of a researcher may influence how they conduct a study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, a confirmability audit was undertaken by the researcher in this study; where she reflected on the research findings, whilst remaining mindful of her own experience of providing psychosocial support as a Trainee in 2021. The reflexivity section of this chapter aims to provide further insight into this audit process.

3.10 STUDY LIMITATIONS

The sample for this particular study, as noted earlier was purposive in nature (the participants were required to have been part of the Rhodes University 2020 Masters in Counselling Psychology cohort pandemic) and further was limited to one specific programme that was geared towards the implementation of CBSL amidst a pandemic. Therefore, the findings may not be generalizable. Further, due to pandemic restrictions, interviews took place on Zoom, which in turn may have limited an all-encompassing appraisal of the participants' behaviour as only their head and shoulders were visible during the interviews. The researcher had engaged in similar activities as a Trainee in 2021 (albeit under less restricted measures, since face to face engagements became more possible, depending on viral spread) – as a result, there was a potential for bias to arise.

3.11 REFLEXIVITY

In light of endeavouring to ensure dependability in the research, it was essential for the researcher to reflect on her positionality as a former Trainee who engaged in CBSL activities. In order to mitigate any potential bias in relation to my positionality, I utilised the BNIM and SQIN - so as to guide the qualitative inquiry, whilst refraining from offering my own personal

or professional experiences during the interview process. Meetings with my supervisor further assisted in critically reflecting on the themes and patterns that arose during data collection.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This chapter is presented in two parts. Part A, which provides contextual information regarding the programme participants, whilst Part B focuses on the experiences of the 2020 Trainee Counselling Psychologist cohort who provided psychosocial support to Educators during COVID-19, in relation to the research questions.

PART A: CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

4.1 Overall programme participants

A total of three members of the 2020 Masters in Counselling Psychology cohort (which consisted of six Trainees) took part in the interview process that was geared towards garnering an understanding into their experience of providing psychosocial support to Educators amidst the peak of the COVID -19 pandemic. Further, the researcher was interested in the participants' positionality regarding the online delivery of psychological services during their first year of Psychology Masters training, as well as the Trainees' views on the practice of CBSL through a digitalized framework, since traditionally CBSL activities that formed part of the CP module were executed on a face to face basis. Additionally, the researcher sought to gain insight into participant narratives surrounding the deployment of CP, so as to reflect upon the degree to which the sub-discipline remained responsive to the times and needs of community partners in Makhanda.

4.2 Participants

All three participants were female, aged between 29 and 51 years. Ethnically, two of participants were amaXhosa and one participant was Shangaan. The participants had completed their first year of Counselling Masters training at the end of 2020 and subsequently completed

their Counselling Psychology Internships at the end of 2021, as per the requirements of the Psychology Board, which is governed by the HPCSA.

PART B: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This section of the findings will be focused on answering the research questions from the data gathered from interviews conducted with three members of the 2020 Masters in Counselling Psychology cohort.

4.3 WHAT WERE THE EXPERIENCES OF TRAINEE PSYCHOLOGISTS PROVIDING PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT WORKSHOPS TO EDUCATORS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC?

Participants reported on their own personal experience of working within a CBSL programme during COVID-19 as Trainee Counselling Psychologists, as well as how they experienced providing psychosocial support to the Educators in the time of the pandemic.

4.3.1 Personal experiences of working within a CBSL programme amidst pandemic

a) Trainee attitudes towards CBSL in 2020

All three participants reported that engaging in CBSL activities during the peak of COVID-19 was challenging. Participant 1 noted that it was difficult to feel confident initially, as she had previously only engaged in community work on a face to face basis.

“... I worked with groups of people before M1, providing presentations and working on particular topics but that was all in person without the fear and dread that COVID brought.

So when this project arose, it was a bit daunting and anxiety-provoking for me.” (1)

Participant 2 stated that she felt overwhelmed at the prospect of engaging with a group of people (Educators) who were on the front line working with children during such a devastating period in history. She further explained that she at times felt hopeless, as no prior training had

fully prepared her to engage with the magnitude of bereavement and loss the participants in her workshops were experiencing. Participant 3 reported that she felt reluctant to engage in CBSL in 2020, as she felt that the pandemic had robbed her and her cohort of the ability to adequately address through their workshops the various challenges faced by their participants. This was indicated in the following statement:

“Hai! This pandemic robbed us; doing community engagement when there was so much distress, whilst also living in the ‘new normal’ was tough.” (3)

b) Shift from being a Trainee to a facilitator

Participant 2 noted that the change in dynamic from being a Trainee who worked almost exclusively on a one to one basis with clients, to shifting to a group setting where she had to come in and provide support felt unsettling, as she was unsure of what to expect. She explained that she wondered what she could offer her group, when she herself was still learning.

“I knew group engagements were coming, but when it happened I thought to myself - what can I offer these folk that can truly make a difference when the world is such a mess? What would I do that could make an impact when both young and old are suffering, you know?... It was intimidating to say the least.” (2)

Participant 1 reported that initially she wondered how she could effectively run a workshop that would be provide new insight to her group as a Trainee - as she was aware that some group members came from schools that already had access to psychological support staff. She explained that she felt worried about re-hashing what some group members may have already known. However, she noted that after delivering her first workshop; that the Educators had to make vast adjustments in order to still be able to teach and support their learners. These adjustments such as delivering online classes had made her group members eager to garner

new skills and understandings of how to cope or mitigate pandemic related stressors. This was evidenced in the following statement:

“I was not sure what I could provide to those group members who did have qualified psychologists working at their schools...In time I realized that what teachers were facing was unlike anything that any of them had experienced before and that made me as a novice feel more comfortable...This was something new for all of us.” (1)

c) Community in COVID

Participant 3 noted that the concept of engaging with community work, which through online means was jarring to her, felt odd. This was because it was challenging to be involved in a space connecting with a number of new people, when every move an individual made outside of the work-shopping was governed by regulations and distance for the majority of her M1 year.

“I remember thinking when I saw all the participants on the screen, everything is so different ...I almost felt like I did not know how to interact with more than 1 person at a time anymore because of the isolation of lockdown - you lose your ability to be social.” (3)

Participant 1 reported that “community” took on a different meaning for her during the time, whereby the concept was not about a geographical setting or being surrounded by those who are of similar cultural, social or class background as oneself, but rather that community needed to be embodied as a feeling. She noted the interplay between her own community at the time – fellow members of the Counselling psychology cohort and the community of Educators they were serving. She explained that in order for their interventions to be impactful, as a cohort they needed to support one another first – so as to understand their strengths and improve areas of weaknesses, which in turn allowed the cohort to act as united front in their mission of providing psychosocial services to Educators.

d) The pandemic as a catalyst

Participant 2 reported that the pandemic changed the way in which mental health professionals engaged with groups of people. She explained that increased creativity was needed and great onus had to be put on making the content presented as captivating as possible, whilst ensuring that presentations were not overly long-winded with psychological jargon. She noted that it was important for the Educators to engage in discussions, as peer experiences turned into peer learning, which was crucial as school staff navigated the pandemic in their various educational intuitions.

“We had to think outside of the box, it could not just be us talking. The teachers had to engage with one another. We needed to find ways to summarise core ideas of the workshops, so they had something to take away – short videos assisted us here, which was something I never really used in my community work before COVID.” (2)

Participant 1 noted that she had to challenge herself by always expecting the unexpected during the workshops and accommodating any changes to the best of her ability; as sometimes changes in the direction of the pandemic happened swiftly and would mean new directives for Educators from the Department of Basic Education. This at times did result in her group being tense or frustrated when they gathered, so it was beneficial to open the floor for discussion about how these directives influenced their holistic well-being before proceeding with the topic for that particular engagement.

4.3.2 Trainee narratives of providing psychosocial support to Educators amidst pandemic

a) Theory as a basis for value-laden praxis

Participant 3 reported that the theory taught during the CP module assisted her in providing psychosocial support workshops to Educators, as Ecological systems theory and its

applications as outlined by Bronfenbrenner (1994) allowed her to gain insight into how different factors such as the varied organisational cultures of schools, provincial and national governance, pandemic trajectory and each group members' own lived experience at the time affected their mental health and well-being. She explained that this insight assisted her in formulating workshop topics that were relatable and provided a sense of consciousness towards the plight faced by Educators during this time.

“Theory allowed me to stay mindful of the fact that they (Educators) were the experts on the challenges they were facing...I could not just do my own thing based on what I was taught, theory grounded me but I had to be realistic in terms of the challenges facing my group and how I could meet their needs.” (3)

Participant 2 noted that it was important to have a theoretical understanding of the principles of CP, as it allowed for her to reflect on whether interventions that had been implemented espoused these values adequately. She reported that theory acted as a guide for her when she felt uncertain because implementation procedures could be tricky.

b) Mutual exchange

Participant 1 noted that the process of engaging with Educators included learning for both parties. She reported that as much as workshops were geared towards providing teachers with support, that the members of her group brought their own knowledge; which in turn gave her a better understanding into how the pandemic had adversely affected the mental health of teachers and their learners.

“I realized during our workshops that the developmental and emotional impact of COVID on our kids was immense... The teachers were very resilient and worked hard to ensure the best possible standard of education and life skills training was provided to their classes but it

struck me how they had to perform these duties; while they themselves were encountering their own challenges...Ja, it was a rough balancing act.” (1)

Participant 2 noted that she and her group of Educators were in a process of continuous adjustment during the peak of pandemic and that this created a learning space on both sides.

“...It was not a one-sided affair, I learnt so much from them.” (2)

She explained that she sometimes felt powerless to assist her clients or group members with pandemic related challenges, as she could not definitively provide them with hope for the future. When Educators would discuss how despondent they felt in terms of their ability to assist their learners while COVID was rampant and ideas would be brain stormed, she garnered perspectives that otherwise she may have never been exposed to; which enriched her overall learning.

c) An emotive experience

All three participants reported that working with Educators was rewarding. Participant 1 explained that she felt moved by the discussions that happened during workshops and realized the importance of providing support to Educators due to the multiple roles they play in the lives of the youth and subsequently how their efforts can afford young people from various backgrounds with the opportunity to grow into adults who can move the nation forward. This is evidenced by the statement below:

“Whenever I heard someone talk about education in this country or when I saw a school building, the first thing that came to mind were the children but now it’s different...By being part of this programme, I realized that without the input of teachers who act not only as Educators but as role models, trusted confidants, caregivers and coaches – our children would be lost.” (1)

Participant 2 explained that teachers were assets that were often overlooked and unappreciated. She reported that despite the challenges facing Educators as individuals living during a worldwide pandemic, their main focus in sessions often remain centred around what they could do to better support their learners and subsequently their development during such an uncertain time. Participant 3 noted that there had been a shift in the way she viewed teachers after working with them. This was noted in the following statement:

“You always just hear the bad, how teachers are underperforming and failing their learners; instances of abuse of power and so forth but working with this group allowed me to see the other side of the coin...They showcased a hunger for knowledge, so they could be more informed in an effort to be able to better assist their learners...It warmed my heart.” (3)

4.4 WHAT WERE TRAINEE PSYCHOLOGISTS’ EXPERIENCES OF MAKING USE OF ONLINE PLATFORMS TO DELIVER PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT TO EDUCATORS

The participants reported on how they experienced making use of Zoom, which is a cloud-based video conferencing platform that can be used for video conferencing, audio conferencing, webinars, meeting recordings, and live chat (Zoom Inc, 2023). The participants utilized Zoom in order to present workshops to Educators on a bi-weekly basis.

4.4.1 Using an online interface as a mechanism for psychosocial delivery

a) Accessibility

Participants 1 and 3 reported that they felt that workshop attendance varied based on the Educators resources, such as access to stable internet connections, as well as their attendees’ technological ability to be able to engage with the application.

“It was tough as sometimes, the teachers struggled with their internet connection, so they would disconnect prematurely from the workshop or there would be times where they were

uncertain as to how to navigate the message function or how to mute or unmute themselves.”

(1)

“...Online engagement did get better after the first session, once everyone was more comfortable with the workings of the platform and had an idea of how the workshops would run.” (3)

Participant 2 commented that the platform itself allowed the participants to connect from their smartphones, which helped in cases where Educators did not have access to laptops or desktop computers. She further noted that she felt relieved that she could still engage with group work, whilst also adhering to health and safety protocols, as she was concerned that due to the pandemic and its ills (such as increased instability within the economy) that Educators that did not have access to Wi-Fi would struggle to access the workshops. This is evidenced by the statement below:

“I was worried that data costs would be a deterrent but the teachers by all means always tried to show up for the workshops.” (2)

b) Online Etiquette

Participant 3 noted the importance of online etiquette for both herself as a facilitator and the attendees. She explained it was important to discuss in the group how questions could be asked, discussions had and feedback ascertained in a way that was respectful to each person who was part of the engagement; whilst remaining mindful of technical glitches that at times were unavoidable. She noted these ground rules also allowed for practice procedures to be established amongst the cohort - as everyone knew what was expected of them when a workshop was taking place. These procedures included but were not limited to the correct positioning of the camera to show the upper body of the presenter, the protocol to follow if the main presenter lost connectivity, when the chat function manager should inform their

colleagues of questions that have been posted, or hands that have been raised, and the compiling of the attendance register by the RSVP manager.

c) Skills development

Participants 2 and 3 noted the need to be mindful of their own abilities when it came to interacting with groups when using a technological interface. Participant 3 explained that while she had used Zoom to attend lectures and have individual sessions with clients, she had to familiarise herself with the roles she had to play during workshops before the engagements took place.

“I had to make sure I knew how to share my screen, manage the chat function and how to manage the RSVPS... Dry runs with my colleagues were essential to feeling more comfortable with doing community work online.” (3)

d) The importance of body language

Participant 1 noted that she had to find ways of conveying empathy through her voice and the parts of her body (head and shoulders) the participants could see on video. She explained that she had to be mindful of the fact that she was not physically in the same vicinity as her attendees, so hand gestures and an open posture were vital.

“I had to ensure they could feel my presence and interest in the challenges they were experiencing even though I was not present in the physical sense with them.” (1)

4.4.2 Online versus in person engagements

All three participants noted that while there is utility in engaging online (such as in times of pandemic) that working face to face with groups is more preferable. Participant 2 noted that it is difficult to “read the room” when working online because one cannot account for the energies of the participants as clearly as what is possible when you are working with a group in person.

“When you are physically with a group, you can see if members are disinterested or following the topic of discussion by means of head nods for example but online, it’s difficult because a lot of the time people kept their cameras off for most of the engagement to conserve data or if their signal was bad.” (2)

Participant 1 noted that more discussion would have been likely to take place in person, as group members would be better able to engage with one another without a screen separating them. She further noted that it was difficult to pick up on “silent voices” online, whereas in person it is easier for the facilitator to pick up on who has not really engaged, in order to work towards opening up the space for those voices to be heard.

4.5 WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF THESE EXPERIENCES FOR THE PRACTICE OF COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY IN OUR LOCAL COMMUNITY SETTING (MAKHANDA)?

The participants shared their narratives with regards to practice of CP after their experiences as Trainees conducting CBSL activities amidst pandemic conditions.

4.5.1 Online training is essential

Participants 1 and 2 noted that it would be imperative for a component of the module to explicitly cater to training student psychologists in the delivery of online services to groups of people. Participant 1 explained that it would be useful for Trainees to know how to conduct community engagements online, as it would allow for a greater scope of practice to be accomplished, whereby one could reach communities and address their needs despite geographical constraints. Participant 2 reported that she felt that she had an additional tool in her psychological skill-set because she could in her internship make use of the skills she had learnt, whilst providing psychosocial support to Educators, when she hosted online workshops for the Rhodes University student community in 2021.

4.5.2 CP and the need to evolve

Participants 2 and 3 noted that it was important that the module and its activities evolved in such a way that took into account what life for the Makhanda community would look like post pandemic. Participant 2 explained that the programme has to remain responsive to the needs of people, once the brunt of the pandemic has passed.

The chapter to follow will discuss these findings in the light of the literature.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The following chapter is a discussion of the findings in relation to the literature and emergent themes.

5.1 ADJUSTING AND RE-ADJUSTING AMIDST PANDEMIC

The accounts of Trainee Counselling Psychologists conducting CBSL activities amidst pandemic conditions highlighted the importance of being able to adjust and re-adjust the means by which postgraduate Psychology students engage with Community work. Contextual factors have a strong influence on the ability of Trainees to engage effectively and responsively to the needs of groups, so as to foster community-based partnerships that are meaningful (Akhurst & Msomi, 2022). In the case of this research study, factors such as accessibility to online platforms, the nature of policies within the Department of Basic Education, lockdown regulations and the mental, social and physical devastation caused by COVID-19 intersected with Educators; as the front-line workers engaging with the countries school going population. These factors called for a degree of competency, innovation and professional development that had not previously been required in times pre – pandemic. This provided an opportunity for growth for Trainees to expand their Psychological expertise through the online provision of psychosocial support, since new ways had to found to espouse the values of CP, as outlined by authors such as Maseko et al. (2017), Kloos et al. (2020), and Visser et al. (2022).

By reflectively engaging with different theories, postgraduate psychology students are able to integrate what they have been taught into their CBSL working experiences (Akhurst, 2017). It is noted that whilst the theoretical underpinnings of the CP module acted as a foundation from which to build the 2020 workshops upon, values such as social justice and empowerment, and participation were impacted as a result of the instability of pandemic conditions.

In particular, social justice as a value may have been easier to fully implement on a face to face basis, as online conditions and the uncertainty brought by COVID infringed on the ability of the cohort to actively lobby for changes at managerial levels, so as to provide Educators with more tangible support and training to assist them with curriculum delivery. Further, the implementation of social justice for communities encompasses strategies designed to uplift those who may be disadvantaged by uneven power distributions (Maseko et al., 2017). Due to the embedding of Educators in the schooling system as service providers rather than stakeholders, the aspiration towards achieving social justice becomes challenged by political constraints. Additionally, while there were efforts evidenced in the findings of Educator participation during workshops, it can be argued that pandemic conditions and systemic elements such as the institutional cultures of the Educators' schools respectively; as well as their own individual realities occurring within their surroundings, impacted the degree to which sense of belonging and inter-connectedness could be fostered.

5.2 TROUBLING THE CONCEPT OF COMMUNITY

The notion of communities being defined as geographical areas that consist of those who are deemed to be underprivileged, lacking in resources and knowledge needs to be problematized if community engagement is ever to go beyond the scope of charitable work (Carolissen et al. (2010). The narrations of the participants evidenced that engaging in CBSL activities amidst pandemic conditions encouraged a worldview that transcended beyond face to face interactions as well as ethnic, social, economic and class structures. This positionality enabled engagements undertaken by the Trainees to move away from the privileged standpoints that often coincide with group work undertaken by those working with community members as a component of their tertiary education, which Akhurst et al. (2016) posits as essential in order for reciprocity to take place between those taking part in CBSL and the groups with whom they interact.

Through this redefinition of community, the implementation of workshops directed towards addressing the psychosocial needs of Educators, despite the logistical difficulties posed by pandemic were able to take place.

5.3 THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Through engaging with authors such as Preece (2013), Akhurst et al. (2016), Akhurst (2017), Akhurst (2021) and Akhurst & Msomi (2022) as well as with this particular study, the researcher noted that similarities exist amongst the overall experience of Trainees engaging in CBSL activities. These included: value-laden praxis, appreciation of community partners and their knowledge and person-centred approaches to intervention as noted in Preece (2013) and Akhurst et al. (2016). However, it is important to note from the findings that the pandemic presented the 2020 cohort with obstacles related to rapport-building and confidence in their own abilities, due to the nature of engaging solely online (which were challenges more easily mitigated by cohorts prior to COVID-19, as they had the ability to interact on a face to face basis with group members). Further, the findings evidence the need for group cohesion amongst postgraduate students working within a CBSL programme, as peer support is imperative, in order to support the implementation of meaningful interventions, especially when traversing the numerous mental health pitfalls that were left exposed by the pandemic.

5.4 PIVOTAL SHIFT IN PROFESSIONAL TRAINING

The findings of the study point towards CBSL activities amidst pandemic as a pivotal moment in the professional training of novice Counselling Psychologists. These activities provided Trainees with community engagement experiences for the first time in their M1 year; whilst also exposing the participants to the intersecting realities of providing group based services through an online delivery mechanism.

5.5 THE UTILITY OF ONLINE ENGAGEMENTS

From the findings, it was apparent that the Trainees found using an online interface as helpful, so as to still be able to engage in community work despite social distancing protocols. They then reported generalising these skills into further work during their internships. However, it is important to note that approach can be limiting in terms of gaining an accurate sense of the positionality and attitudes of group members towards the workshop subject matter, the Trainees disseminating the information as well their own feelings toward other members of the group. This may indicate a lower degree of intimacy being present when engaging online instead of on face to face basis. In addition, participants commented on the need for the continuous development of skills particularly in e-counselling and online facilitation, so as to ensure that practitioners remained abreast of platforms that can be used, to ensure that psychosocial support services remain accessible, when in-person engagements are not possible or feasible.

5.6 IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE CBSL ACTIVITIES IN MAKHANDA

The findings evidence the need for CBSL activities to remain responsive to the needs of community members and stakeholders amidst and post pandemic. The rise of COVID-19 highlighted the importance of ensuring that postgraduate Psychology training programmes do not become complacent in terms of their training standards and protocols, but rather that innovation and progressive strategies need to be applied, so as to ensure that Trainees are as prepared as possible for the various working environments that may find themselves in after graduation. Further, it can be deduced from the narratives shared by the participants that as a result of the devastation caused by the virus on the economy, family systems and subsequently the Basic Education sector; that Trainees need to be prepared to deal with mental health concerns that have been woven into the realities of community partners, such as local Educators. This calls for a holistic approach to CBSL activities, whereby interventions need to

deployed in a manner that include addressing the injustices that impinge on the mental health and well-being of school staff members, whilst being mindful of the role of the university, as a cornerstone of the Makhanda community. This can possibly be achieved by suggesting engagements amongst Educators, school management teams, the Rhodes Community Engagement Office and members of the Rhodes Psychology Department (inclusive of Trainees), to the M1 programme coordinator for consideration.

5.7 PROCESS COMMENTS

Research participants noted enjoying taking part in the interview process, as it allowed for them to reflect on their professional training journey thus far. They remarked that the process allowed them to consolidate their feelings, attitudes and prior learning experiences regarding providing psychosocial support to Educators online from a more nuanced perspective; since at the time of data collection they had completed their tenure as Intern Counselling Psychologists and thus had gained more exposure to working online with groups of people.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

6.1 SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

From the findings, it becomes clear that Trainee Counselling Psychologists who engaged in CBSL activities with Educators in 2020 experienced both professional and personal growth through their Community engagement processes. Research participants reported that their experience of the CP module presented as part of the first year of their Masters training and the subsequent psychosocial support they rendered had required them to implement the theory they were taught in such a way that value-laden praxis could be achieved. This was by means of creating and providing workshops that were geared towards addressing the mental health concerns voiced by their attendees. It is noted that COVID-19 adversely affected Educators, as they had to balance their vocational responsibilities with the reality of living and coping with family challenges within the confines of a global pandemic. Through the narratives of the participants, the importance of online competencies, mutual learning, and skills development were highlighted as key spheres of which to remain cognisant, in order to allow for interventions to remain responsive to the needs of the community members they were serving.

Further, the accounts of the participants in this study showcased the utility of online platforms as a mechanism of psychosocial support delivery when face to face engagements are not feasible (as in pandemic times); whilst providing insight into areas of potential difficulty such as accessibility by participants and facilitators' proficiency related to the use of online applications. The findings demonstrated that online approaches may be somewhat limiting in their capacity, as it was difficult for facilitators to accurately ascertain what the thoughts, feelings and attitudes of group members were whilst engaging in the workshops; as non-verbal prompts and body language could not be depicted or "read" fully on screen. Overall, the Trainees interviewed found participating in the programme beneficial and that it allowed for

the integration of core competencies (community engagement and in light of prevailing circumstances, online exposure to group work) to form part of their professional Psychology training, which in turn assisted in conducting similar engagements post M1.

6.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study focussed on garnering the experiences of Trainee Counselling Psychologists' providing psychosocial support to Educators during COVID-19. This focus led towards the exploration of CBSL activities undertaken by the 2020 Rhodes University Counselling Psychology cohort and whilst three participants were sufficient for data collection purposes in this particular research project, it would be useful to have a larger sample, so as to ascertain greater insights into the Trainee experiences and the programme itself. Further, whilst the SQIN methodology afforded the collection of rich individual textual narrations through the interview process, it may have limited the expression of narratives that could have been elicited if a focus group had been used instead, whereby participants could have jointly shared and reflected on their community engagement processes in 2020, perhaps commenting further through being prompted by other responses.

A perceived benefit of the use of focus groups in qualitative research is that the method allows participants to provide a breadth of similar experiences, whilst allowing for groups dynamics to interplay in such a way that discussion and thought-provoking debate can take place (Gundunmogula, 2020). This could have been beneficial so as to allow for a deeper understanding of the experiences of Trainees conducting psychosocial support workshops amidst pandemic conditions to be brought to the fore. This additionally has the potential to provide a platform for critical appraisals regarding project implementation to be shared.

6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings and discussion presented as part of this study, the following recommendations are proposed by the researcher: Firstly, that a longitudinal study should be conducted with Trainees providing psychosocial support workshops post-2020, so as to ascertain the possible long-term implications of the pandemic on their experience of CBSL activities. Secondly, that a study is undertaken that examines the voices of community partners who are on the receiving end of similar CBSL engagements (as in Akhurst & Msomi, 2022), in an effort to provide insight into how these interventions may or may not have assisted in meeting their mental health needs. These perspectives could then be compared and contrasted with Trainee voices in the literature in order to improve professional practice. Lastly, that the programme coordinator for the M1 CP module and the Rhodes department of Psychology should ensure that Trainees are able to receive exposure to working online with groups of people through their curriculum; so as to allow the programme and its training standards to stay relevant to times during and post-pandemic.

6.4 FINAL COMMENTS

The CBSL activities undertaken by the Rhodes 2020 Trainee Counselling Psychology cohort and their pioneering stance towards moving the application of CP onto an online platform amidst pandemic conditions showcased the important role of Counselling Psychologists' in communities during and post COVID-19. This highlights the roles of CP and CSBL activities, as stepping stones that allow Psychology as a science, discipline and profession to take its place (which has long been neglected) at the forefront of advocating for social change within the South African context. It is hoped that the data generated in this study might assist in programme planning and professional training, so as to allow psychological interventions to be dispensed in a way that continues to strive towards reciprocal changes within our communities.

In a country that has historically experienced various challenges within our schooling communities, it is hoped that by adding the postgraduate student voice to the literature regarding CBSL activities with Educators in particular, that a holistic approach to mental health and wellness might be achieved for this group of influential people, who form such an integral part in supporting and promoting the development of the nation's youth.

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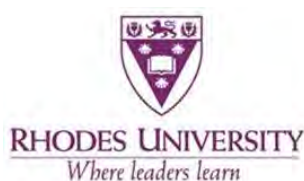
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APPENDIX A.1: INITIAL ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER



Rhodes University Human Ethics Committee
PO Box 94, Makhanda, 6140, South Africa
t: +27 (0) 46 603 7727
f: +27 (0) 46 603 8822
e: s.mangele@ru.ac.za
NHREC Registration number: RC-241114-045

<https://www.ru.ac.za/researchgateway/ethics/>

25/10/2021

Allison Simonse

Email: g21s7010@campus.ru.ac.za

Review Reference: 2021-5003-6221

Dear Ms Nqobile Msomi

Title: Trainee Psychologists' experiences of providing psychosocial support to Educators during COVID-19 in South Africa.

Principal Investigator: Ms Nqobile Msomi

Collaborators: Ms Allison Simonse

This letter confirms that the above research proposal has been reviewed and **APPROVED** by the Rhodes University Human Ethics Committee (RU-HEC). Your Approval number is: 2021-5003-6221

Approval has been granted for 1 year. An annual progress report will be required in order to renew approval for an additional period. You will receive an email notifying you when the annual report is due.

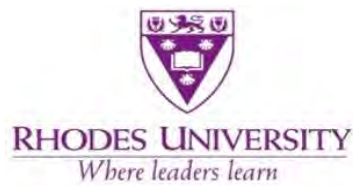
Please ensure that the ethical standards committee is notified should any substantive change(s) be made, for whatever reason, during the research process. This includes changes in investigators. Please also ensure that a brief report is submitted to the ethics committee on the completion of the research. The purpose of this report is to indicate whether the research was conducted successfully, if any aspects could not be completed, or if any problems arose that the ethical standards committee should be aware of. If a thesis or dissertation arising from this research is submitted to the library's electronic theses and dissertations (ETD) repository, please notify the committee of the date of submission and/or any reference or cataloguing number allocated.

Sincerely,

Prof Arthur Webb Chair: Rhodes University Human Ethics Committee, RU-HEC

cc: Ms Danielle de Vos - Ethics Coordinator

APPENDIX A.2: ETHICS APPROVAL RENEWAL LETTER



Rhodes University Human Research Ethics Committee
PO Box 94, Makhanda, 6140, South Africa
t: +27 (0) 46 603 7727
f: +27 (0) 46 603 8822
e: ethics-committee@ru.ac.za

<https://www.ru.ac.za/researchgateway/ethics/>

23 October 2023

Ms Allison Simonse

Email: g21s7010@campus.ru.ac.za

Review Reference: 2023-5003-8149

Dear Ms Allison Simonse

Re: Human ethics renewal application: Trainee Psychologists' experiences of providing psychosocial support to Educators during COVID-19 in South Africa.

Researcher: Ms Allison Simonse

Supervisors: Professor Jacqueline Akhurst,

This letter confirms that the above Annual Report has been reviewed and **APPROVED** by the Rhodes University Human Research Ethics Committee (RU- HREC). Your Approval number is: 2023-5003-8149

Approval has been granted for 1 year. An annual progress report will be required in order to renew approval for an additional period.

Please ensure that the Human Research Ethics Committee is notified should any substantive change(s) be made, for whatever reason, during the research process. This includes changes in investigators. Please also ensure that a brief report is submitted to the ethics committee on the completion of the research. The purpose of this report is to indicate whether the research was conducted successfully, if any aspects could not be completed, or if any problems arose that the Human Research Ethics Committee should be aware of. If a thesis or dissertation arising from this research is submitted to the library's electronic theses and dissertations (ETD) repository, please notify the committee of the date of submission and/or any reference or cataloguing number allocated.

Sincerely,

Dr Janet Hayward

Chair: Rhodes University Human Research Ethics Committee, RU-HREC

cc: Ethics Coordinator

APPENDIX B.1: GATEKEEPER PERMISSION – THE DIRECTOR OF STUDENT AFFAIRS



DIVISION OF STUDENT AFFAIRS. Email: studentaffairs@ru.ac.za

CONFIDENTIAL

04 October 2021

Allison Simonse, g21s7010
Department of Psychology
Rhodes University
Grahamstown

Dear Ms Simonse,

Permission to conduct research

Research topic: *“Trainee Psychologists' experiences of providing Psychosocial Support to Educators during COVID-19 in South Africa.”*

This letter confirms that the above research proposal has been reviewed by the Rhodes University – Director of Student Affairs and been APPROVED.

Yours sincerely



.....
Ms Nomangwane Mrwetyana

Director of Student Affairs

APPENDIX B.2 GATEKEEPER PERMISSION – THE REGISTRAR



RHODES UNIVERSITY
Where leaders learn

Office of the Registrar
Eden Grove Building, Lucas Avenue, Makhanda, 6139, South Africa
PO Box 94, Makhanda, 6140, South Africa
t: +27 (0) 46 603 8101
f: +27 (0) 46 603 7561
e: registrar@ru.ac.za

www.ru.ac.za

29 September 2021

Ms Allison Simonse
G21S7010
Department of Psychology

Dear Ms Simonse

REQUEST FOR GATEKEEPERS PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH WITH RHODES UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Name of research proposal: Trainee Psychologists' experiences of providing psychosocial support to Educators during COVID-19 in South Africa.

This serves to confirm that you have been granted permission to conduct your proposed research at Rhodes University as requested.

Kindly be advised that the University is not obliged to make any arrangements in terms of this research, and that the onus is on the researcher. It is also your responsibility to protect the integrity of the University in the manner in which you collate and engage the data.

This letter is valid from 29 September 2021 to 28 September 2023.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "A. Moodly".

Professor Adèle Moodly
REGISTRAR

APPENDIX C: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY



Rhodes University Department of
Psychology

Information about Study

Dear _____

I, Allison Simonse am currently a M1 Counselling student, who is interested in conducting a preliminary study of your experiences as the Masters in Counselling Psychology Trainee Cohort of 2020, with regards to the provision of psychosocial support workshops to Makhanda Educators during COVID-19 last year.

I am interested in exploring your experiences and documenting your voices, as I believe your insights add to the ever- growing body of literature surrounding COVID-19 and ways to support our communities during and post pandemic.

The proposed research topic is: *Trainee Psychologists' experiences of providing psychosocial support to Educators during COVID-19 in South Africa.*

The objectives are to:

- i. Gather your experiences as Trainee Psychologists engaging with CBSL amidst pandemic.
- ii. Situate your experiences of providing psychosocial support to Educators during COVID-19 within the context of Community Psychology in South Africa.
- iii. Provide insight into the use of online methods for the delivery of psychosocial support.
- iv. Use findings to possibly inform future offerings of the Masters in Counselling Psychology's Community Psychology module at Rhodes University

Your participation would involve being interviewed by me using the SQUIN method (i.e. Single Question Inducing Narrative). This involves two sub-sessions that will take place on the same day (there will be a short interval in-between) and a final session a maximum of 3 weeks later (once I have completed the transcription and can ask follow-up questions). Each of these sessions will take about 30 - 45 minutes to complete.

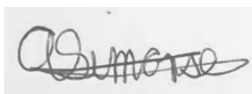
These sessions will be audio-recorded and the recordings as well as the subsequent transcriptions will be securely stored on an end to end encrypted device. To protect your privacy, all contributions you make will be anonymized and no demographic information/identifying data will be recorded. In addition, a summary report will be compiled of the findings and made available to you.

It would be an honour to engage with you regarding the proposed project. The informed consent letter is attached and supplies further information.

Please feel free to contact me on allisonsimonse@gmail.com or 0734201631 to indicate your interest in participating in this study, or if you have any questions, comments or concerns. I am being supervised by Rhodes University Psychology Clinic Coordinator and registered Counselling Psychologist Ms Nqobile Msomi. Her contact details are as follows: **Ms N. Msomi, n.msomi@ru.ac.za or 046 603 7417.**

You can also contact the Rhodes University Research Ethics Coordinator about any perceived ethical concerns, Ms D de Vos on d.devos@ru.ac.za or 046 603 7727.

Yours Sincerely



Allison Simonse

Rhodes University, Research Office,
Ethics Ethics Coordinator: [ethics-
committee@ru.ac.za](mailto:ethics-committee@ru.ac.za) t: +27 (0) 46 603
7727 f: +27 (0) 86 616 7707 Room
220, Main Admin Building, Drostdy
Road, Grahamstown, 6139.

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM



PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT DECLARATION

Project Title: Trainee Psychologists' experiences of providing psychosocial support to Educators during COVID-19 in South Africa.

Allison Simonse from the Department of Psychology, Rhodes University has requested my permission to participate in the above-mentioned research project.

The nature and the purpose of the research project and of this informed consent declaration have been explained to me in a language that I understand.

I am aware that:

1. The purpose of the research project is to explore the experiences of Trainee Counselling Psychologists who provided psychosocial support to Educators during COVID-19 in 2020, as part of the community based service learning (CBSL) component of the annual Counselling Psychology Masters Year one (1) Community Psychology module.
2. The Rhodes University has given ethical clearance to this research project: 2021-5003- 6221 and I have seen/may request to see the clearance certificate by contacting Ms D de Vos (d.devos@ru.ac.za) I may also contact Ms de Vos regarding any perceived ethical concerns.
3. By participating in this research project I will be adding the student voice to the ever- growing body of available COVID-19 and CBSL related literature in order to facilitate knowledge generation amidst

pandemic, while also providing insights into online methods of psychosocial support-so as to explore possibilities for further online psychosocial engagements during and post COVID-19 in relation to keeping Counselling Psychology as a discipline relevant to the times and focused on the needs of communities within the South African context.

4. I will participate in the project by taking part in 3 short interviews based on the SQUIN method attached: 2 interviews will take place on the same day (with a short break in- between) and the final interview will take place a maximum of 3 weeks later once transcription by the researcher has taken place.

5. My participation is entirely voluntary and should I at any stage wish to withdraw from participating further, I may do so without any negative consequences.

6. I will not be compensated for participating in the research.

7. The following risks are associated with my participation: It may be perplexing for me to read about my experiences at one point in time, considering the growth of professional identity that takes place through participation in a professional training program such as Masters. I may also be worried about any comments that may be perceived as "negative" with regards to how the Community Psychology module and subsequent CBSL activities were conducted, however this is mitigated by the focus and purpose of the research which is to explore my experiences of providing psychosocial support to Educators amidst pandemic, whatever their nature and how these insights can be used to improve understandings of CBSL activities in the context of a pandemic. Additionally, this may be used to improve future offerings of the MA Counselling Community Psychology course. Furthermore, risk is mitigated as all data including identities will be anonymized. Although, members who are familiar with the Psychology department may be able to identify the specific activity being explored (CBSL amidst pandemic) and the identity of participants; the proposed study aims to provide insight into experiences of Trainees with a focus on online CBSL activities and their utility for Community Psychology/ Counselling Psychology practice during and post pandemic, thus with this as a central focal point, the potential for risk/harm is mitigated. Additionally,

gatekeeper permission is sought from two regulatory bodies (The Registrar and Student Affairs) and all identifying information pertaining to the institution will be anonymized.

8. The Researcher intends publishing the research results in the form of a mini-dissertation as part of the research component of her MA Couns. Degree. However, confidentiality and privacy will be maintained as all identifying information will be anonymized. Further, all transcriptions will be kept on a secure end to end encrypted device which only the researcher will have access to.

9. I will receive feedback in the form of a summary report regarding the results obtained during the study.

10. I understand that the interview sessions will be audio recorded. The Permission Release Form allows me to indicate my consent.

11. If any part of participating in the research is activating, I can contact the following support channels: FAMSA Makhanda on 046 622 2580 or Fort England outpatient services on 046 602 2352.

12. Any further questions that I might have concerning the research or my participation will be answered by Ms A Simonse (the researcher) who can be contacted on 0734201631 or allisonsimonse@gmail.com. Alternatively, the Project Supervisor, Ms N Msomi can be contacted on n.msomi@ru.ac.za or 046 603 7417.

13. By signing this informed consent declaration, I am not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies.

14. A copy of this informed consent declaration will be given to me, and the original will be kept on record.

I,, have read the above information / confirm that the above information has been explained to me in a language that I understand and I am aware of this document's contents. I have asked all questions that I wished to ask and these have been answered to my satisfaction. I fully understand what is expected of me during the

research.

I have not been pressurized in any way and I voluntarily agree to participate in the above- mentioned project.

.....
Participants signature

.....
Date

Rhodes University, Research Office, Ethics
Ethics Coordinator: ethics-committee@ru.ac.za:
+27 (0) 46 603 7727 f: +27 (0) 86 616 7707
Room 220, Main Admin Building, Drostdy Road, Grahamstown, 6139

APPENDIX E: PERMISSION TO USE TAPE RECORDINGS



Rhodes University — Department of Psychology

USE OF TAPE RECORDINGS FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES- PERMISSION AND RELEASE FORM

Name of participant			
Participant's contacts details	Email address: Phone number:		
Name of researcher	Allison Simonse		
Level of research	Honours	Masters✓	PhD
Brief title of project	Trainee Psychologists' experiences of providing psychosocial support to Educators during COVID-19 in South Africa.		
Name of supervisor	Nqobile Msomi		

DECLARATION

(Please initial/tick blocks next to the relevant statements)

1.	The nature of the research and the nature of my participation have been explained to me.	Verbally	
		in writing	
2.	I agree to be interviewed and to allow recordings to be made of the interview.	Audiotape	
		Videotape	

3.	I agree to _____ and to allow recordings to be made.	Audiotape	
		Videotape	
4.	The tape recordings may be transcribed	without conditions	
		only by the researcher	
		by one or more nominated third parties	
5.	I have been informed by the researcher that the tape recordings will be erased once the study is complete and the report has been written. Or I give permission for the tape recordings to be retained after the study and for them to be utilized for the following purposes and under the following conditions.		

Signature of participant: _____

Date:

Witnessed by researcher: _____

Date:

Rhodes University, Research Office, Ethics
Ethics Coordinator: [ethics-
committee@ru.ac.za](mailto:ethics-committee@ru.ac.za): +27 (0) 46 603 7727
f: +27 (0) 86 616 7707

Room 220, Main Admin Building, Drostdy Road, Grahamstown, 6139