COMMUNITY INSIGHTS: EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF HOMELESSNESS THROUGH PHOTOVOICE

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Abstract

Homelessness is a growing concern globally. In South Africa this population is estimated to be comprised of up to 200 000 individuals. In Cape Town alone 7383 people are homeless. The magnitude of this population is predicted to increase exponentially in the future. Research in South Africa has mainly been aimed at measuring the prevalence of this phenomenon. There is an urgent need for bottom-up research with this vulnerable group, as to gain a greater understanding of their lived realities form their perspectives. By drawing on a community psychology framework and participatory action research methodology, a Photovoice study exploring the lived experiences of homelessness was constructed. Six participants were entrusted with cameras to capture the strengths and challenges that are embedded in their lives. The interviews, focus groups along with photo-stories were then interpreted using thematic analysis. A range of challenges surfaced that centred on their harsh living circumstances, experiences of multiple victimisation, and the adversities of substance use. Despite these difficulties, this research uncovered that participants are not mere victims of their social condition. They offered narratives that bring to the fore their roles as strong human beings who have agency. Despite grave economic disadvantages, they developed a strong set of skills and drew on a range of informal and formal social networks to survive. A secondary analysis offers insight on participants' experiences of empowerment, social capital and critical consciousness, which enfolded during the course of the project. Based on these findings a recommendation for future research is presented.

Keywords: community-based participatory research; empowerment; homelessness; Photovoice; South Africa;

Homelessness is a global phenomenon. It is estimated that up to one billion individuals are homeless worldwide (Habitat as cited in Homelessness World Cup Foundation, 2018). In South African metropolitan cities, makeshift beds on sidewalks and individuals holding cardboards beside roads, is becoming an ever more familiar sight (Du Toit, 2010). The latest estimates made by the Human Science Resource Center indicate that there are 100 000 to 200 000 homeless individuals nationwide (Rule-Groenewald, Timol, Khalema, & Desmond, 2015). In Cape Town alone approximately 7383 people are homeless, with 2521 of these individuals sleeping in shelters and 4862 living on the street (Hendricks, 2015). In their extreme deprivation from society, restricted access to basic facilities and as frequent victims of violence, it can be said that they are one of the most vulnerable in society (Cross, Seager, Erasmus, Ward, & O'Donovan, 2010). According to Du Toit (2010) the homeless population is likely to expand exponentially in the future, stressing the importance of addressing this issue.

Research aimed at quantifying the extent of the South African homeless population has been conducted. Even though this research is imperative, the nature of the phenomenon cannot be fully comprehended. Comprehensive qualitative inquiries that enable the active participation of these individuals and focus on their lived experiences serve as a crucial starting point (Olufemi & Reeves, 2004; Roets et al., 2016). Through these approaches direct insights on the complexities of their lives can be attained which in turn can encourage the formation of more meaningful interventions (Olufemi & Reeves, 2004; Roets et al., 2016). The study exploring the lived experiences of homelessness through Photovoice has been constructed in the backdrop of the aforementioned.

Review of the South African Literature

Conceptualisation of Homelessness and Demographics in South Africa

Different conceptualisations of homelessness are adopted in the South African literature, ranging from shack dwellers to those who live on the street (see for example Cross et al., 2010; Olufemi, 1998; Roets et al., 2016; Seager & Tamasane, 2010). Within the context of this study 'homelessness' refers to the latter.[1] Extensive research has been

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[1] The conceptualisation used in this research builds on the established definition of Cross et al. (2010), which deems individuals who have no stable roof over their heads, particularly those who have experiences of living on the street, as homeless. The term 'street' is further

conducted on the demographics on the South African homeless population. Street homelessness occurs in both rural and urban districts (Cross et al., 2010) and is experienced by all races (Roets et al., 2016). A growing number of white and coloured individuals are sleeping rough, although the majority remain black (Cross et al., 2010; Seager & Tamasane, 2010). Quantitative evidence indicates that more men land on the streets than women and the homeless population is largely comprised of adults (Olufemi, 2000; Seager & Tamasane, 2010).

The Roots of Homelessness

Homelessness in South Africa dates back to the colonial period when black individuals were forcefully removed from their lands to live in designated 'black' areas (Kok, Cross, & Roux, 2010). This stripped black families of their homes and livelihoods. Many became so called 'squatters'. The apartheid spatial policies resulted in large-scale forced removals. Although this compelled most individuals to move to shack settlements, it additionally created a space for street homelessness to expand (Kok et al., 2010).

To date, acute poverty is intrinsically connected to homelessness in the South African context (Cross et al., 2010; Kok et al., 2010). This is illustrated by the extensive qualitative study conducted by Cross and Seager (2010). They found that many young adults who are unable to attain financial independence are reluctant to remain home, knowing that their presence can exacerbate the existing economic hardships of their families. As a result, they frequently choose a life on the streets (Cross & Seager, 2010). This is done out of desperation, challenging the preconceived idea that homelessness is motivated by aspiration (Cross & Seager, 2010). With a national unemployment rate of 26.5 percent, it comes as no surprise that many South Africans find themselves homeless (Statistics South Africa, 2017). Unemployed individuals are especially vulnerable as they are incapable of keeping up with the increasing housing costs (Okumu, 2006). The public housing backlog in South Africa is aggravating this condition, as individuals remain without a stable shelter (Ambrosino as cited in Moyo, Patel, & Ross, 2015).

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elaborated to not only include those who sleep on streets (e.g. sidewalks, alleys etc.), but also those who have experiences of sleeping in other open spaces such as vacant lands. It therefore represents an overarching definition that, nevertheless, remains distinct from the shack dweller population.

Not all South African's who confront the aforementioned structural forces become homeless. Individual factors are therefore contributing to the situation as well. According to the findings of Cross and Seager (2010), dysfunctional family dynamics and household adversities, such as childhood abuse, are the key reasons for South African children and adolescents to abandon their homes for the streets when no other housing options are accessible to them. Moreover, individuals with mental health difficulties are commonly at risk for experiencing street homelessness (Carol, Karina, David, & Edward, 2004). Condemned by family members and a society which through rapid mental health care deinstitutionalisation fails to offer appropriate support services, these individuals often find no alternatives other than a life on the streets (Moyo et al., 2015).

Despite this substantial body of local literature on the demographics and causal factors associated with street homelessness, research aimed at understanding the depth of the experience from the perspectives of these individuals is lacking (Panter-Brick, 2002). It is argued that focusing solely on identifying the causal factors while dismissing the lived realities of the affected, prevents researchers from fully understanding the phenomenon. Exploring the complexities and strengths of the lives of those without shelter and getting to understand who they are as individuals, can offer superior insights on how to meet their psychological, social and physical needs (Myburgh, Moolla, & Poggenpoel, 2015). More importantly, involving them in the research process can serve as an opportunity for them to partake in decision-making processes which are essential "to their future as contributing members of society" (Myburgh et al., 2015, p. 1).

Local Qualitative Studies

Qualitative studies investigating the phenomenon of street homelessness are evident in the South African literature, but they remain meagre. The phenomenological study of Olufemi and Reeves (2004) exploring the lives of street homeless women in Johannesburg represents one of these studies. The findings highlight the daily challenges these women are facing, such as no access to running water and proper sanitation, which poses a health risk. Sleeping in open spaces prohibits their safety and thus increasingly exposes them to sexual violence and robbery. This has led many to find comfort in the use of substances (Olufemi & Reeves, 2004). Research conducted by Myburgh et al. (2015) on street children in Johannesburg, reported daily abuse which evoked negative feelings in children and often

resulted in criminal behaviour and substance use. Similarly, Hills, Meyer-Weitz and Oppong Sante (2016) found that street children in Durban were commonly subjected to violence from the police and used substances as a coping mechanism.

The research outlined above provides insights on the challenges these individuals are faced with, and yet, it remains limited as it exclusively focuses on the experiences of women and children. Despite research demonstrating that more adults are homeless in South Africa than children (Seager & Tamasane, 2010), only a small number of local studies have focused on the adult population (Cross et al., 2010; Olufemi & Reeves, 2004). Street children are more extensively researched (see for example Mashologu-Kuse, 2007; van Jaarsveld, Vermaak, & van Rooyen, 2011; Ward & Seager, 2010). This evident underrepresentation of the adult population in the South African literature calls attention to the urgent need for research aimed at understanding the challenges this specific group encounters.

Although the majority of qualitative inquiries have examined the difficulties encountered by the street homeless population, there are a few that found the homeless to be resilient. Myburgh et al. (2015) suggests that despite the survival challenges, street children expressed resilience and perseverance. In a similar way, the findings of Hills and colleagues (2016) indicate that street children in South Africa through their personal strengths, peer relationships and sports activities, were able to survive the harsh living circumstances. In line with these research findings then, and with the argument put forth by Roets et al. (2016) that the resilience of this population should not be underrated – the following research furthermore explored the strengths embedded in the lives of the street homeless.

Aims and Research Questions

Aims

The main purpose of this study was to qualitatively explore the lived experiences of homelessness in Cape Town, South Africa. The aim was to examine the challenges as well as the strengths embedded in the lives of homeless individuals. By using the Photovoice methodology, the researcher hoped for participants to form new social ties, gain critical awareness of their communities, and become empowered.

Main Research Question

- How do individuals portray their lived experiences of homelessness through Photovoice?

Sub-Questions

- What challenges do these individuals face?
- What do they perceive as strengths in their lives?
- Can the active participation of homeless individuals raise critical consciousness, develop new social capital and empower them?

Methodology

Theoretical Framework

The project approached the research questions from a community psychology lens. Community psychology examines the interactions between communities and social systems, and recognises that injustices within these systems are oppressing individuals (Kloos et al., 2012). It therefore values an empirical stance to action-based research to influence social change (Kloos et al., 2012). A core tenet of the discipline is a value-based practice that maintains that research cannot be 'objective' and therefore represents a deliberate critique to traditional psychology's claim of 'value-free' research (Malpert et al., 2017).

With its acknowledgement of social power differentials, community-based research is committed to foster 'empowerment' in those communities whose narratives are devalued (Malpert et al., 2017). Members of marginalised communities – who frequently feel powerless – become empowered when they realise they have the power to control their own lives (Gibson & Swartz, 2004). At the heart of the community psychology agenda is the aim to foster individual capacity to mobilise for action. The notion of 'social capital' is a conceptual tool used to facilitate this (Saegert & Carpiano, 2017). It refers to the resources within social networks that individuals can draw from to bring about meaningful change (Boslaugh, 2008). According to Freire (2005) individuals can only transform their social realities once they attain 'critical consciousness' – they realise that certain power structures disempower them. Community practice strives for this via group dialogue and critical reflection (Montenegro, 2002). The following research is grounded in the above theoretical constructs underpinning community psychology.

This framework was valuable for exploring the research topic; as it enabled the researcher to comprehend the ways in which the experiences of homeless individuals are shaped by their social positioning. Moreover, through the theoretical constructs of empowerment, critical consciousness, and social capital, the impact of the research process could be evaluated.

Research Design

The following study is embedded in the qualitative research paradigm. More specifically, a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach was adopted; given that it places the values of community psychology at the forefront of inquiry (Malpert et al., 2017). It is a form of participatory-action research (PAR) that involves a collaborative research process, and thus deconstructs the traditional research-participant power relations (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014; Gibson & Swartz, 2004). With an explicit orientation towards transformation, CBPR aims to generate knowledge used to facilitate social change (Holkup, Tripp-Reimer, Salois, & Weinert, 2004). It represents a radical epistemological challenge to mainstream research traditions, as it recognises existence of multiple knowledges on a social phenomenon, and thereby adopts a counterhegemonic approach to knowledge production (Kindon, Pain & Kesby, 2007).

Photovoice. Photovoice developed as a qualitative method within CBPR (Strack, Lovelace, Jordan, & Holmes, 2010). It is a grass-roots tool that provides individuals with cameras to document their lived realities through photography and storytelling. This method has derived its foundations from documentary photography, feminist theory and Freire's critical pedagogy (Wang & Burris, 1997). The theories underpinning this approach align well with the theoretical principles of the study (Rania, Migliorini, Rebora, & Cardinali, 2015). Photovoice was selected as its emphasis on creating a partnership with marginalised community members - whose realities are traditionally silenced - rendered it appealing for research with homeless individuals (Holkup et al., 2004). The photographic and participatory element was valued in that it encouraged participants to share experiences they would not under different circumstances. This was important given that participants had experienced victimisation and engaged in behaviours deemed risky by society.

Participants and Recruitment

The researcher collaborated with a Non-Profit Organisation called Khulisa. Khulisa's Streetscapes programme is a job creation scheme for the homeless in the Cape Town area. By offering employment and skills development, Khulisa aims to uplift individuals who live on the street and reintegrate them in society. Six homeless[2] individuals were recruited through this programme. Initially eight participants were recruited, but two withdrew from the project. The ages of participants ranged from 27 to 63 years, and the duration of being homeless from nine months to 20 years. All participants had lived on the street, and yet at the time of the project five out of six participants slept in a temporary shelter during winter. One participant did not stay at this shelter and slept outside or occasionally at friends. Three of the participants were female and three were male. All individuals were South Africans. Three identifed as black, two as coloured and one participant chose not to provide a racial identification.

Data Collection and Procedure

Data was collected through focus groups, interviews and photo-stories. The personal interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed.

Phase 1: Initial Focus group. Data collection commenced with a one-hour long focus group. Participants were asked questions designed to encourage them to reflect on their experiences of being homeless (see Appendix A for focus group schedule). The focus group served as a valuable introduction to the project, as participants were able to share their unique experiences, and relate to each other through collective narratives raised.

Phase 2: Photography Training and Photo Production. After the group discussion, participants attended a photography workshop held by a professional photographer. The session was interactive as they were given the opportunity to practice with the disposable camera. Participants' were informed on the issues around the use of cameras, ethics and safety. The cameras were given to participants shortly after the workshop. The capturing period had to be extended as to accommodate all participants. When participants' were done,

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[2] There has been much debate on the label of 'homelessness', particularly due to the ideologies reflected in the term (see Olufemi, 2002 for elaboration). Participants identified with multiple terms throughout the project, including 'street people', 'homeless people' and 'drifters'. Seeing that all participants had experiences of living outside on the 'street' (sidewalks, open lands etc.), the terms 'street homeless', 'homeless', 'rough sleeping' or 'people who live on the street' were used to refer to participants.

the cameras were collected for processing. Individual interviews were held with each participant. During these meetings they selected six photographs and developed the stories behind them. A range of questions were asked as to facilitate this (see Appendix B for the interview schedule). Initially this was planned to occur as a group activity. The researcher however decided against this, as the group dynamics made it clear that not all participants would have been able to fully voice their stories.

Phase 4: Exhibition. The researcher met with participants' after the interviews to ensure that they were satisfied with their photo-stories and to enable them to make changes if needed. The particularities of the exhibition were discussed and the date confirmed. The exhibition took place on the 23rd of August 2018 in the foyer of the Psychology Department at UCT. Individuals from the Streetscapes team, friends and academics from the department attended. Participants' presented their stories to the audience. The displayed photographs remained in the foyer for another three weeks.

Phase 5: Final Focus Group. A final focus group was set up to comprehend participants' experiences of the Photovoice project. Various questions were asked as to illicit a critical dialogue among the group (see Appendix C for focus group schedule).

Data Analysis

The focus groups, interviews and photo-stories were analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a widely used qualitative analytic method (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process involves codifying data, and identifying, formulating and analysing themes within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is not theoretically bounded rendering it flexible. It is therefore useful for analysing data embedded within a participatory research paradigm (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The position of participants within this paradigm is that of reflexive experts who have the capacity to voice their most significant narratives (Kindon et al., 2007). As such it was important to not confine the boundaries of the analysis with a fixed approach. It is this epistemological freedom that allowed for an unrestricted exploration of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step procedure on using thematic analysis was followed. Firstly, I carefully examined the data as to become familiar with it. I then organised and coded the entire data set. The codes were condensed into themes and continuously revised.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this research was granted by the Psychology Department Research Ethics Committee (REC) of the University of Cape Town.

Informed consent and confidentiality. Participants were informed about all aspects of the research before participating in the project. The researcher went over the informed consent form carefully with each participant and provided time for any questions. Participants were made aware of their right to withdraw from the research at any point and it was ensured that participation was voluntary. They were offered the option of additional language support, but decided to not make use of this. Participants were informed that the meetings would be recorded and that they could request for recordings to be stopped at any time. The signed consent forms were received before the data collection commenced (see Appendix D). To safeguard participants' anonymity, their personal information was concealed by using pseudonyms. The importance of confidentiality and mutual respect throughout the project was stressed.

Risk and benefits involved. The benefits of the project included the development of photography skills; and the building of awareness by means of sharing the narratives with the public. There were minimal risks involved. Nonetheless, it was recognised that the sensitive nature of some experiences could have possibly distressed some participants. As such participants were encouraged to only share what they felt comfortable with. In case they would have experienced distress, the researcher would have referred them to Khulisa's counsellors for support. Guidance was provided on how to take photographs so as to diminish any possible threats.

Ethics surrounding secondary participation. The issue of taking photographs of individuals external to the project was discussed. Participants were informed to gain verbal consent before capturing secondary participants.

Reflexivity

Qualitative researchers are expected to be reflexive; they need to continuously assess in what manner they may have influenced their research (Primeau, 2003). My inherent personal beliefs may have influenced how I made sense of the social worlds of my participants. I recognise that another researcher may have interpreted their narratives differently. More importantly, I am aware that my social identity has placed me in a position of privilege. I am a white female postgraduate student. My participants are people of colour who have endured extreme poverty and social exclusion. This shaped a particular power dynamic which could have impacted the way they voiced their experiences. Although participants acted as co-researchers, certain processes such as the write up of the research rested with me. This is not to undermine that there is power in telling a story and that story being heard; it rather seeks to be critical by highlighting that I as the researcher still have power, even in a collaborative research relationship.

Findings and Discussion

The findings were structured into three sections: the challenges faced on the streets; the strengths embedded in their lives; and the impact of Photovoice on participants.

The Challenges Faced on the Street

This section provides insights on the adversities participants' endured on the street. Under these living circumstances even satisfying one's basic human needs becomes a taxing task. Experiences of victimisation and substance use further exacerbate this dire situation. Three themes emerged surrounding the challenges:

- Exposure to harsh living conditions
- Multiple victimisations experienced
- The struggles with substance use

Exposure to harsh living conditions. The poor living circumstances portrayed by participants were gravely concerning. Participants' occupied spaces where basic amenities were unavailable to them. Access to sanitation facilities such as showers and toilets are limited for those who sleep rough (Olufemi, 1999; Olufemi & Reeves, 2004). Khuzani who has been homeless for twenty years described the challenge of being unable to access water:

When you must wash you must go to the washing shelter (…). It is 18 Rand to wash. Some of us don't have that every day you know. (…)[3] It is hard to get water because securities don't allow [us][4] to get water here (…). So you are going to plead to him because you want to wash, you are stinking. Then he gives you water [because] he can see you are serious cus' you are stinking in front of others (PI[5]).

Although bathhouses are available in Cape Town, Khuzani raises the issue of costs. In his experience of extreme poverty, this service was beyond his reach. This has left him with no choice other than to make use of public facilities prohibited by guards. The constraints imposed on him have made him neglect his personal hygiene to a point where it was noticed by others. This awareness signifies a loss of dignity and pushed him into desperation as he begged the security to grant permission to wash. Having to plead for approval to satisfy a human need as to feel human again is a dehumanising experience, just as much as it is demeaning.

Tasneem lived on a vacant plot for almost four years. In her photo-story she explains the toilet method used:

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[3] (…) Ellipsis in round brackets indicates that part of the participants' original speech has been removed from the quoted extract.

[4] Square brackets indicate that additional information was added to the original extract for clarification.

[5] PI: Extract taken from personal interview

Toilet

This is a toilet, but I never used to sit there because it was dirty. (...) I used to get myself a bucket with a plastic inside. Then I go to my 'hokkie' [makeshift shelter], do my thing and then throw it there this side. This is the best way you can make sure that you do not catch any infections (Tasneem).

The above is a shocking, yet common reality for those who sleep on the streets, as well as South Africa's shack dweller population. It may be true that the bucket-system offers a better solution when limited options are available. The dumping of plastic bags filled with human waste along with the open defecation, nonetheless, continue to pose a serious health threat to those who occupy the land (Olufemi, 1999).

Olufemi's (2000) research with homeless women in South Africa found that they experienced food insecurities. Individuals who live on the street struggle to access food which drives them to search for food in public spaces. Thabo's photo-story demonstrates the grim reality of having to resort to bins when starving:

'Skarrel' & Scatter.

Since I was living outside on the street when I got hungry I had to opt for dustbins, even though I kept it undercover. When you go for the dustbin you are hungry and you will be expecting something, but (…) you might not find anything.

Trash picking is done out of a desperate need to survive. Thabo 'kept it undercover' as he felt embarrassed of his actions. It is an unconventional practice that evokes strong disapproval from greater society. More importantly, it is not a reliable food source, given that sometimes nothing is found and as stated by Thabo "[then you] go hungry to bed without food" (PI). This food insecurity places individuals at an increased risk for malnutrition (Olufemi, 1999; Tibbetts, 2013).

Multiple victimisations experienced. Life on the streets is rife with violence and danger (Olufemi & Reeves, 2004; Whitbeck, Hoyt, & Bao, 2000). In the eyes of the outsider the homeless are associated with mischief, which obscures their victimised realities. As explained by Sadiki (2016, p. 43) they "fall out of the ideal victim profile" resulting in their violent encounters to often be dismissed by others. Three sub-themes surfaced around experiences of victimisation.

Theft and assault. Rough sleeping has been found to place individuals at increased risk for assault and robberies (Myburgh et al., 2015; Seager & Tamasane, 2010). This is supported by the research as participants mentioned experiences of physical assault and theft. From the analysis it became apparent that the homeless victimise each other. This is often motivated by feelings of envy. As explained by Thabo:

> *People get jealous. Let's say you are doing drugs (...). They want to know how you managed to get that money. So you get lots of enemies without your knowledge. Then you (...) wash your tekkies [shoes], you put them there [and] you never find them (FG1).*

Power dynamics are at play here. All homeless individuals are severely marginalised due to their material positioning. However, when they gain material resources they are perceived to be in advantageous positions in relation to other homeless individuals. Thabo's ability to sustain his drug habit stirred feelings of envious resentment in others. The theft provided a way for others – who felt they were in an inferior position – to disempower him. This jealousy commonly places individuals in situations of conflict compelling them to resort to violence for protection: "You have to be able to defend yourself regularly from jealousy. …You have to make a mark to survive and sometimes you are sent to hospital or you send somebody to hospital" (Asif, FG1). It is evident that a culture of violence exists.

Harassment. Extensive research documents that the homeless community is subjected to harassment by the police (Daly, 1996; Hills et al., 2016; Myburgh et al., 2015). Within this study, participants stressed how they were burdened by the routine practices performed by law enforcement and security guards. They shared experiences of how security guards would chase them away from their sleeping spots. The harshness of guards was revealed by narratives of fear: "I was so scared because there were security guards around. So we had to hide and go sleep in a certain corner" (Thabo, FG1).

Given the public nature of their sleeping arrangements, the street homeless are easy targets. Guards are employed to protect spaces from trespassers. Public spaces are therefore viewed as sites of danger needing surveillance (Hatty, Davis, & Burke, 1996). This perceived responsibility of guards and the general stereotype of the homeless as troublemakers creates a hostile environment in which they are excessively troubled. Participants who occupied a vacant plot raised the frustration of their shelters being demolished. This experience was

deemed as stressful, as it would leave them with no protection against the rain and compel them to scavenge again for materials to rebuild their shelters.

Research has shown that outsiders view these living arrangements as an eyesore (Ogunkan & Adeboyejo, 2014). Although this is merely a way for them to survive, it is perceived as undesirable and results in authorities to employ harsh practices to rid them from public spaces. This is taxing and lays bare the reality that they are unwelcome in society. Their marginalised social positioning and the public nature of their lives renders them extremely vulnerable to victimisation.

Victimisation through stigmatisation. The above victimisation is grounded in the stigmatising views surrounding homelessness. According to Goffman (1963) stigmatisation results from "the dynamics of shameful differentness" which disqualifies a group from "full social acceptance" (p. 140). Stigma therefore involves social exclusion, negative perceptions and labelling of the marked group, and arises in a context of unequal socioeconomic power dynamics (Belcher & DeForge, 2012).

Local research reveals that individuals who live on the street are vulnerable to stigmatisation in the form of discrimination from greater society (Olufemi, 2002). Consistent with this literature, experiences of stigmatisation were raised during the project. Khuzani expressed his frustration of being insulted by outsiders:

> *Some of them tell you "You are a bergie". So like that man make me crazy, I don't follow him. I am not a bergie, I am a human being! (…) No matter he is rich* (PI).

The process of labelling accentuates the negative social perceptions of homelessness. 'Bergie' is an informal term prevalent in the public discourse of Cape Town commonly used to refer to homeless individuals (Ross, 2010). This is pejorative term as it infers an inability to take care of oneself (Ross, 2010). These stigmatising views portray the homeless as being deficient of certain important human qualities. Khuzani being aware of this, rejects this by stating that despite being homeless, he is still "a human being". This label is founded along socioeconomic differences. Khuzani however argues that the material privileges of outsiders do not grant them the 'right' to exert power over him.

Being cognisant of these stigmatising views, participants expressed feelings of shame due to their social positioning. When asked what they did first thing in the morning, Esther responded, "I could not even show my face. … I am like shy…I don't want everyone to see

that I am staying there" (FG1). Esther's reluctance to show her face in public suggests a fear of social judgement. Similarly, Tasneem stated: "There were a lot of people who knew me. I made sure I did not come out of that … plastic. I stay the whole day." (FG1). Tasneem knew a lot of people through her sex work. Feeling ashamed of her 'homelessness' and in fear of being devalued by others, she tried to conceal this aspect of her life.

The struggles with substance use. Substance use has been reported as widespread among the homeless population (Fisher & Breakey, 1991; Olufemi, 2000). Illicit substance use within the community was perceived as problematic by non-users. For example, Esther described how it was challenging for her to settle into the vacant plot due to the substance use of others: "All of them smoke drugs….I mean I do not use it.… It is difficult for me" (PI). The violence that results from intoxication was perceived as distressing. Additionally, it was found that substance use formed part of an initiation practice into some street homeless communities. This is corroborated by the extracts below:

Carmen: *It seems like there are specific groups, and it is difficult to get in. So how were you able to get in?*

Asif: *Sometimes you have to make sacrifices. Sometimes you have to prove yourself.*

Tasneem: *You have to smoke.*

Asif: *That is how most of us come into drugs and drink* (FG1).

It is apparent that new entrants gain respect and thus acceptance into the community through substance use. Research has found that resistance within these contexts can result in adverse consequences (Asante, 2016). This holds true for the participants. It would signify a loss in acceptance and protection from others, given that smoking signifies the formation of a partnership. With the pervasiveness of violence on the streets and rejection from greater society, it is argued that individuals may feel coerced into this risky behaviour (Asante, 2016).

Some participants disclosed experiences of personal substance use. These narratives revealed the serious detriments of substance dependency, which included financial exploitation, physical injuries, an undermined emotional wellbeing, and severed family ties. Tasneem, for example, openly admitted "I abandoned them [her children] through my use of

drugs" (PI). Her photo-story below accentuates the emotional instability resulting from substance dependency, and the use of substances to escape this distress:

My Experience of the Outside Life

This is a 'lolly' [Tik pipe] or 'aparaat' [device] as they call it. (…) I cried almost because of this stuff. (…) Sometimes when it was stressful, I would smoke the whole week (Tasneem).

The Strengths Embedded in Their Lives

Despite the range of disadvantaged realities documented, the analysis revealed that the street homeless are not mere victims of their socioeconomic condition. They are strong, resilient human beings who have agency, and actively navigate the adversities they encounter to survive. Two themes emerged as participants' spoke about the strengths in their lives:

- Developing innovative survival strategies
- Networks and resources as sources of strength

Developing innovative survival strategies. Parallel to previous research (Bender, Thompson, McManus, Lantry, & Flynn, 2007), the findings of this study demonstrate that in the face of grave economic disadvantages, participants developed a strong set of subsistence skills to sustain themselves. They adopted various innovative strategies to earn an income, and referred to this way of life as 'skarreling' (scavenging). Thabo's photo-story portrays the diverse street-based occupations:
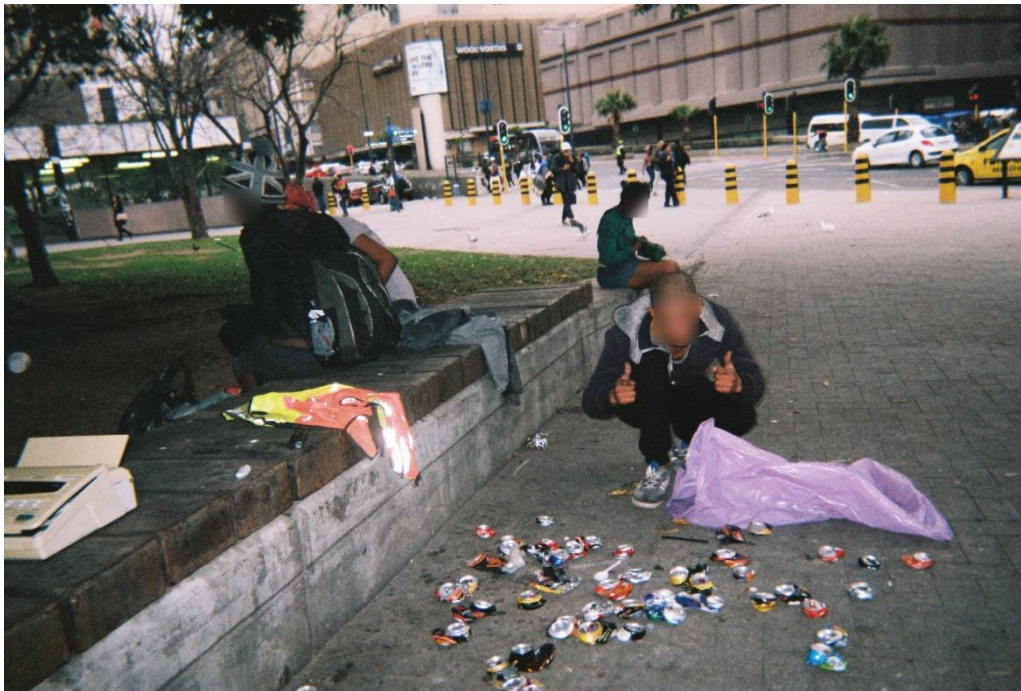
Money Making Ways

Recycling (...) cans is a way of living on the streets, a way to make extra cash for food. (...) As you can see there is an old gadget on the side that has been picked up in a dustbin. If it is working we will clean it up and resell it. There is also a vest there which is used for car parking.

The aforementioned subsistence strategies confirm previous findings by Olufemi (2000) and Ross (2010) who note that these are commonly employed by the homeless in South Africa. The discussions with participants however demonstrated that access to certain economic strategies were limited. To illustrate, according to Asif, to do car parking is challenging because every area is occupied, and "to get the position…you have to fight. …I was not prepared to get stabbed" (PI). Even though individuals locate ways to sustain themselves – in a context of unstable employment – violence is used as a device to keep restrictions in place and maintain a hierarchy amongst the street community. It can be said

that this territoriality serves as a tactic to safeguard this precious economic resource (Donald & Swart-Kruger, 1994).

Other than finding economic strategies, participants furthermore used their ingenuity to find solutions and uncover sites where they could obtain essential resources. This 'street-wit' is apparent in Esther's following photo-stories:

Washing Line

It is where we put our washing. (…). There is not many places where you can hang your washing. It is the only solution you have (Esther).

Water Hole

This is where we get water. There is a small hole. (...) The water comes out there. We use that water to bathe with or to do washing. We keep a bucket there at the hole (Esther).

The photo-stories illustrate that even in extreme deprivation, participants' exhibit human agency by ameliorating their own conditions. The vacant plot lacks all basic amenities, and yet unconventional ways are used to overcome these restrictions. Drawing on the ideas of Thompson et al. (2013) the process of hanging washing on fences may not be perceived as a 'prosocial' practice by outsiders; nonetheless, it shows that in order to survive the street homeless find solutions unique to their circumstances.

Networks and resources as sources of strength. The accounts represented in this section challenge the misconception that individuals who sleep rough have no social ties (Belcher & DeForge, 2012). Although they may not have many close connections to greater society, they remain social agents who draw on a variety of informal and formal social networks to survive.

Support amongst the community. Based on research by Donald and Swart-Kruger (1994) the street-based community plays an imperative role for physical survival in terms of sharing basic necessities and protection against violence. This dynamic became apparent from the discussions with participants'.

Friends in Low Places

One of my colleagues he helped me get this job and I am so grateful for him. He stays in this tent. (...) Sometimes when I would need a place to stay I would sleep here (Asif).

Asif's photo-story demonstrates that social relationships are key sources of strength on the streets. Given that there is a common desire for survival, homeless individuals are willing to share certain resources. According to Asif, this dynamic works because they can count on each other in times of need. If individuals are however reluctant to uphold this reciprocal relationship, they are deemed as enemies. The expression "If you are not with us, you are against us" (Asif, FG1), is an unwritten rule guiding the social dynamics on the streets.

Moreover, participants' voiced narratives on how they could depend on certain individuals to watch out for them when a sense of mutual respect existed: "They will protect you. If they see you maybe drunk or you are going to get in trouble … they will vouch for you" (Tasneem, FG1). From the way participants' spoke about the street dynamics, it was clear that a sense of camaraderie is present among the homeless. It is, nonetheless, argued that this companionship is conditional, as they explained how they were constantly expected to prove their camaraderie by keeping silent on unlawful matters, participating in illegal

activities, and by sharing their substances. As pointed out by Asif: "[if] a very good friend refuses …he is not my comrade anymore" (FG1).

Beyond the protection offered and resources shared, relationships were found to enhance an individual's self-esteem and thus resilience to the hardships experienced. This became apparent when Khuzani stated: "[we] still got people who love us on the streets. So that gives me power to not judge myself or take me down" (PI). The significance of social support has no boundaries; regardless of location and social positioning, this extract shows that it acts as an important buffer against adversities.

Assistance from organisations. An important strength for participants were the societal resources available to them. This is supported by Hills et al. (2016) who discovered that community-based services strengthened the resilience of the street youth in South Africa. Participants' mentioned how several services – ranging from the soup kitchen to the temporary shelter programme – greatly alleviated the stressors in their lives. Their narratives foregrounded their value and they expressed immense gratitude for this formal assistance.

The positive impact of the Streetscapes programme became particularly prominent in the analysis. Participants' reported how their work provided them with "hope for tomorrow" (Sisipho, PI), and thus freed their minds from the anxieties associated with economic insecurity. Receiving a stable income has enabled participants to pursue things they were previously unable to. According to Thabo, the performance of these 'ordinary' tasks, such as purchasing clothes from a shop, made him "feel human again" (P1). Participants' generally felt content with their jobs, and those who worked in the gardens described how enjoyable it is:

Trafalgar Garden

This is where I am working. It is nice. The 'tuin' [garden] is making me happy. I enjoy myself, It is green everywhere (Esther).

Streetscapes offers more than just economic opportunities; it also provides crucial social support within the work space. The programme has enabled participants to form relationships that move beyond the street homeless community. This is essential as it acts as a platform for inclusivity, and directly challenges the social alienation homeless individuals are faced with. It provides a "sense of belonging" (Asif, PI) that crosses the classist borders.

Participants' Experiences of Photovoice

Community psychology is devoted to the enhancement of marginalised communities. A key consideration within the field then is to employ methods designed to uphold this (Prilleltensky, 2001). PAR research methods are increasingly valued, partly due to the impacts they are thought to have on participants (Wandersman, 1999). A second focus group was conducted to explore participants' experiences of the project, and to uncover whether it had an impact on them. Three themes emerged related to the processes of empowerment, critical consciousness and social capital. The findings of this research are consistent with the literature which suggests that the Photovoice method has the capacity to benefit individuals (e.g. Killon & Wang, 2000; Wang & Burris, 1997).

Becoming Empowered through Photovoice. Empowerment is the "development of a certain state of mind" (Sigogo & Modipa, 2004, p. 324) associated with feelings of competence, worthiness and self-esteem. The exhibition served as a tool for empowerment. When participants were asked to reflect on their experiences of presenting at the exhibition, Asif and Tasneem pointed out how it made them feel acknowledged:

Tasneem: *It gave me a positive outlook on my life.*

Asif: *A sense of being. A sense of importance.*

Tasneem: *Like I am worthy.*

Asif: *Somebody taking note of me. You don't have that normally in street life* (FG2[6]).

As one of the most excluded members of society, individuals who are homeless are commonly disregarded by outsiders, which crumbles their self-worth. Spaces that foreground marginalised voices and recognise the importance of their experiences have opposite effects. The process of sharing their narratives with others, made participants realise their capacities. They described how they became confident to communicate with others in a way they never did before. To illustrate, Tasneem, when recounting her experience said: "It opened me up further to other people. …I could speak what my past was all about" (FG2).

Participants' were astonished by their accomplishments. They disclosed how the photographs surpassed their expectations. It was emphasised how the audience was stunned by their outcomes which demonstrates that participants were aware of the preconceived ideas others have about them: "People were surprised. …They never expected it to be such a success" (Tasneem, FG2). The success of the exhibition challenged the assumptions that homeless individuals are apathetic and unable to contribute to something meaningful. It showed that they can achieve things in life when provided the opportunity to do so.

According to Campbell (2004), individuals are empowered when they feel confident in their abilities to realise goals. Recognising their capacities has boosted participants' self-esteem and motivated them to take active steps to move forward in life. When asked whether participating in this project had made them think differently or perhaps changed something in their lives, one participant responded by stating, "It made me look with a different eye…cus'

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[6] FG2: Extract taken from the second focus group

you see the way I was living before it was very dangerous life…I want to go to rehab" (Thabo, FG2). Participants had become assertive in their power to control their personal lives. Sisipho made this clear when she explained how she had decided to move out of the shelter to do what is best for herself: "I think I have made a first step, a brave one. Trying to stand up for myself" (FG2).

Evoking Critical Consciousness. Participants reported that they gained insights about their communities through the diverse experiences shared. Some developed a critical consciousness about the socio-political conditions that disempower them. This conscientisation is visible in Asif's photo-story below:

The Train Station

This is where I can sometimes travel for free. We call it "stealing train". (…) Sometimes I can't because they heavily patrol the trains. Then I have to sacrifice my job (…). I want people to know that this is what society has done for us, teaching us how to steal trains. And they are creating more homeless people through their failed policies (Asif).

Asif recognises that structural forces, namely that the failure of society is contributing to homelessness. In the context of failed policies individuals are compelled to 'steal trains'; although this may not assure a favourable outcome. In this extract the interplay of the

personal and structural are evident. More specifically, how the social context of an individual can limit economic opportunities and thus prevent upward mobility.

This critical consciousness involves the recognition that oppressive social relations need to be defied, and an understanding on how to engender this (Campbell, 2004). When asked why participants thought it is imperative to share their experiences with greater society, Tasneem asserted that this would ensure for powerful actors to gain an in-depth understanding of their realities and thus challenge the stigmatising perceptions surrounding homelessness:

> *This is now a way for them to see a clearer picture not by judging street people. (...)*
> *It is by looking at them and saying that this person is worthy of doing something. (...)*
> *This is the future for them. That we look at them in a new way* (FG2).

Promoting the formation of social capital. Apart from having had empowering experiences and a deeper awareness of their social condition, participants built new social capital by forming new relationships among group members. Seeing each other's stories has made them feel less isolated and fostered a sense of belonging. This was articulated by Asif: '[It] helped me not to feel so secluded....there [are] other people who are also going through my sufferings' (FG2). The project seemed to serve as a platform that strengthened participants' commitment to their community. The importance of sharing the photo-stories with a greater audience as to increase awareness was stressed. In addition, participants exhibited a strong need to improve the lives of their peers by taking active roles in their communities: "We as a group can…talk to other people and…motivate them." (Tasneem, FG2).

Conclusion

Through critical dialogue, story-telling and photography, participants were able to creatively explore their experiences of homelessness, and share these with others. Analysis of the data uncovered that participants were faced with numerous challenges; including exposure to harsh living circumstances, experiences of multiple victimisations and battles with substance use. Although their socioeconomic positioning limits them; they are not passive victims. The street homeless are active agents who successfully negotiate their survival challenges by drawing on various sources of strength. It is in their extreme poverty, that these individuals develop strong subsistence skills to sustain themselves, and use this ingenuity to adapt their deprived environments. From their lived accounts, it is evident that their social worlds are marked by complexities. To benefit from the strengths embedded in their communities – such as protection from violence, access to scarce resources and social acceptance – they are expected to prove themselves by engaging in activities deemed as risky by society. Once they are accepted in the community, a reciprocal relationship based on respect needs to be maintained. Despite being unconventional, these group dynamics were regarded positively by participants. The findings furthermore indicate that the stressors experienced by participants were eased by the access to several societal resources. The Streetscapes programme was perceived as particularly impactful in that it provided them with both economic and crucial social support. A critical evaluation of the Photovoice methodology found it to have a positive effect on participants in terms of the development of critical consciousness, social capital and empowerment.

The findings of this study thus provide useful insights into an under-researched population. This could serve as valuable to powerful stakeholders who have the means of constructing relevant programmes that could alleviate the adversities experienced on the street, while fostering community capacities. The focus on community strengths does not aim to locate the responsibility for social change within the community. The urgent need for structural change is strongly emphasised.

It is important to note that not all individuals experience homelessness the same way. Certain homeless individuals may encounter distinct oppressions due to other aspects of their social identities (for example race or gender). These may not be foregrounded in a broad analysis. For that reason, it is recommended that future research adopts an intersectional lens to further explore this important research topic.

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Appendix A: First Focus Group Schedule

We are going to start by introducing ourselves. Please say your name, where you are from and tell the group something interesting about yourself.

- Please tell me what it is like to live on the streets?

If participants are struggling to answer the aforementioned question then ask:
- Do you remember the first night you spend on the streets?
- How did you feel?
- What did you do when you woke up?

Further questions:
- What do you consider valuable in your life right now?
- What challenges do you face when living on the streets?

Appendix B: Individual Interview Schedule

- Where did you take this photo?
- What made you decide to take this photo?
- What is the story this photograph tells?
- How does it relate to your life?
- Why is this so important to you?
- Why do you want to share this photograph with others?

Appendix C: Second Focus Group Schedule

- What made you decide to take part in this project?
- How did participating in this project make you feel?
    - Was there anything you liked particularly about the project or something you did not?
    - Did you learn anything about yourself by participating in this project?
    - Did you learn anything about the other group members or your community?
- Do you feel that this project has inspired you to think differently or do anything different in your life?
- How did the exhibition make you feel?
    - Do you believe it is important to show others your photographs and stories? If yes, please tell me why you think so.
- What would you have done differently?

Appendix D: Informed Consent Form

University of Cape Town

Department of Psychology

Making the streets their homes:

Exploring the lived experiences of people living on the streets through Photovoice

Invitation and Purpose

The University of Cape Town and Khulisa invite you to take part in a study that seeks to explore the experiences of those living on the street.

Procedure

This research will use a research method called Photovoice. Photovoice involves giving people cameras and asking them to take photographs that represent their experiences. These photos are then used to tell a story.

The following will happen if you decide to participate in this study:

- You will be asked to take part in a group discussion in which I will ask you and the other participants to tell me what it feels like living on the streets. You will also be asked to speak about your daily difficulties and your good experiences of living on the streets. This will take about one and a half hours.
- Afterwards you will be offered a photography training where a professional photographer will teach you photography skills. This will not take longer than one and a half hours.
- You will receive two disposable cameras to borrow for a period of two weeks during which you need to take the photos.
- After you are done taking the pictures you will be asked to join a group activity. Here the researcher will show you all your photographs. You will be asked to select five

photos and write down the story behind each of them. This will be a fun activity in which you will also show the participants your photos and briefly explain their stories. This meeting will take about two hours.

- Your selected five photos and their stories will be exhibited to others.
- We will meet one last time as a group to discuss how your participation in this research has made you feel. This group discussion will take about an hour.
- Participation in this project is voluntary. You don't have to take part in this study if you don't want to. You can also withdraw from the study at any point in time without any negative consequences.

Risks, Discomforts and Inconveniences

- This study should not cause any risks to you. You will be taught how to take photographs so as not to cause a threat to yourself.
- Sharing your stories could potentially trigger unpleasant memories for you. It is important for you to know that you will be encouraged to only speak about things you feel comfortable about.
- If you do feel distressed during the research please remember you can leave the study any time without any consequences. If you would like to talk to someone about how you are feeling, the researcher will refer you for counselling.
- Although you might be inconvenienced by taking out time to participate in this study, each meeting does not take longer than two hours. This means your participation will not consist of more than six hours over a period of two months.

Benefits:

- Participating in this study will give you a space to share your experiences, speak about the challenges you face and what you value about living on the streets.
- More importantly, letting others hear your stories can raise awareness about what you are experiencing and hopefully help develop ways in which the lives of your community members could be improved.
- Although we might not be capable of changing your living situation, we wish that through your participation in this study you will find ways of making positive changes in your own life.
- Joining this project will also provide you the opportunity to learn photographic skills and exhibit your work to the public.

Privacy and Confidentiality

- We assure you that we will do everything in our power to ensure that your stories and photographs will not be traceable to you. Your name will be concealed in the write up of the project and in any potential publications. All your personal information will be locked away.

- The group discussion will take place in a private room and participants will be asked to keep what has been said to themselves. Despite this, we are unable to stop other participants from sharing what has been discussed with others outside the group.

- Group discussion will be audio recorded with a tape recorder. These recordings will only be used by the researcher and her supervisor and will not be accessible to anyone else. You have the right to demand the tape recorder to be switched off at any point during the discussions.

- It is important for you to know that anything that is discussed in the group meetings and your photo stories can be reported in the thesis and potential publications of the researcher. You will still remain anonymous.

Secondary Participation

You need verbal consent from any person you want to photograph. You will need to explain to the person how come you are photographing them and where the photograph will be used. Please get verbal consent from a parent or a guardian if you take photos of individuals who are younger than 18 years.

Contact Details

If you have any further questions or concerns in relation to this research project please do not hesitate to contact Carmen Fromke at 0628539936 or Dr Shose Kessi at shose.kessi@uct.ac.za.

If you would like to contact the chair of the ethics committee please contact Mrs Rosalind Adams at the Department of Psychology, University of Cape Town, 021 650 3217.

I understand the purpose of the research, all its procedures, possible risks, benefits and time commitments. I give the researcher permission to use a copy of the photographs and the information discussed in the group sessions in her research, in academic reports and potential publications. I would like to take part in this study and know that I can withdraw from it at any time without any negative consequences.

Participant's Name: _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Permission to be tape recorded during group discussions:

I give permission to have my voice recorded with a tape recorder during the group discussions.

Participant Signature: _____